INTERNET
The Votes and Proceedings for the House of Representatives are available at

Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives,
the Senate and committee hearings are available at

For searching purposes use
http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au

SITTING DAYS—2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 25, 26, 27, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>19, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RADIO BROADCASTS
Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on ABC NewsRadio in the capital cities on:

- ADELAIDE 972AM
- BRISBANE 936AM
- CANBERRA 103.9FM
- DARWIN 102.5FM
- HOBART 747AM
- MELBOURNE 1026AM
- PERTH 585AM
- SYDNEY 630AM

For information regarding frequencies in other locations please visit
http://www.abc.net.au/newsradio/listen/frequencies.htm
FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION—FIFTH PERIOD  

Governor-General  
Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia  

House of Representatives Officeholders  

Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP  
Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP  
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP  

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP, Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz MP, Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Hon. Danna Sue Vale MP and Dr Malcolm James Washer MP  

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP  
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP  
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP  
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP  

Party Leaders and Whips  

Australian Labor Party  
Leader—Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd MP  
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP  
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP  
Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP  

Liberal Party of Australia  
Leader—Hon. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP  
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP  
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP  
Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP  
Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP  

The Nationals  
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP  
Chief Whip—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP  
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP  

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
<td>Lyons, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman</td>
<td>Grayndler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Hon. Kevin James</td>
<td>Menzies, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey, Hon. Frances Esther</td>
<td>McEwen, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles</td>
<td>Paterson, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bevis, Hon. Archibald Ronald</td>
<td>Brisbane, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidgood, James Mark</td>
<td>Dawson, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick</td>
<td>Dunkley, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird, Sharon Leah</td>
<td>Cunningham, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen</td>
<td>Mackellar, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel</td>
<td>Curtin, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles</td>
<td>Prospect, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradbury, David John</td>
<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briggs, Jamie Edward</td>
<td>Mayo SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent, Russell Evan</td>
<td>McMillian, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Anna Elizabeth</td>
<td>Chisholm, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen</td>
<td>Watson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, Mark Christopher</td>
<td>Port Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael</td>
<td>Holt, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, Jodie Louise</td>
<td>Bass, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion, Nicholas David</td>
<td>Wakefield, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeseman, Darren Leicester</td>
<td>Corangamite, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester, Darren</td>
<td>Gippsland, Vic</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciobo, Steven Michele</td>
<td>Moncrieff, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, Jason Dean</td>
<td>Blaxland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth</td>
<td>Calare, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Julie Maree</td>
<td>Franklin, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combet, Hon. Gregory Ivan, AM</td>
<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costello, Hon. Peter Howard</td>
<td>Higgins, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coulton, Mark Maclean</td>
<td>Parkes, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay</td>
<td>Hotham, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danby, Michael David</td>
<td>Melbourne Ports, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Ath, Yvette Maree</td>
<td>Petrie, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debus, Hon. Robert John</td>
<td>Macquarie, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreyfus, Mark Alfred, QC</td>
<td>Isaacs, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig</td>
<td>Dickson, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliott, Hon. Maria Justine</td>
<td>Richmond, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Annette Louise</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony</td>
<td>Rankin, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer, Hon. Patrick Francis</td>
<td>Macarthur, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas</td>
<td>Reid, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM</td>
<td>Batman, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew</td>
<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, John Alexander</td>
<td>Mallee, Vic</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM</td>
<td>Kingsford Smith, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gash, Joanna</td>
<td>Gilmore, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georganas, Steven</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George, Jennie</td>
<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiou, Petro</td>
<td>Kooyong, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbons, Stephen William</td>
<td>Bendigo, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen</td>
<td>Lalor, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Hon. Gary, AO</td>
<td>Brand, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grierson, Sharon Joy</td>
<td>Newcastle, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter</td>
<td>Bruce, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haase, Barry Wayne</td>
<td>Kalgoorlie, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hale, Damian Francis</td>
<td>Solomon, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Jill Griffiths</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartsuyker, Luke</td>
<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke, Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawker, Hon. David Peter Maxwell</td>
<td>Wannon, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Christopher Patrick</td>
<td>Werriwa, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull, Kay Elizabeth</td>
<td>Riverina, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew</td>
<td>Flinders, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons, Stephen James</td>
<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irwin, Julia Claire</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, Sharryn Maree</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkins, Harry Alfred</td>
<td>Scullin, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Michael Andrew</td>
<td>Ryan, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katter, Hon. Robert Carl</td>
<td>Kennedy, Qld</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keenan, Michael Fayat</td>
<td>Stirling, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM</td>
<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerr, Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun, SC</td>
<td>Denison, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Catherine Fiona</td>
<td>Balfarar, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laming, Andrew Charles</td>
<td>Bowman, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope</td>
<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay, Hon. Peter John</td>
<td>Herbert, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livermore, Kirsten Fiona</td>
<td>Capricornia, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce</td>
<td>Barton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin</td>
<td>Groom, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKew, Hon. Maxine Margaret</td>
<td>Bennelong, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise</td>
<td>Jugajaga, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMullan, Hon. Robert Francis</td>
<td>Fraser, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marino, Nola Bethwyn</td>
<td>Forrest, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus, Louise Elizabeth</td>
<td>Greenway, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marles, Richard Donald</td>
<td>Corio, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, Margaret Ann</td>
<td>McPherson, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melham, Daryl</td>
<td>Banks, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabella, Sophie</td>
<td>Indi, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Scott John</td>
<td>Cook, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor</td>
<td>Pearce, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Hon. John Paul</td>
<td>Lowe, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal, Belinda Jane</td>
<td>Robertson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson, Hon. Brendan John</td>
<td>Bradfield, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neumann, Shayne Kenneth</td>
<td>Blair, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville, Paul Christopher</td>
<td>Hinkler, Qld</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakeshott, Robert James Murray</td>
<td>Lyne, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick John</td>
<td>Gorton, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owens, Julie Ann</td>
<td>Parramatta, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parke, Melissa</td>
<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearce, Hon. Christopher John</td>
<td>Aston, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrett, Graham Douglas</td>
<td>Moreton, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price, Hon. Leo Roger Spurway</td>
<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice</td>
<td>Sturt, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raguse, Brett Blair</td>
<td>Forde, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey, Rowan Eric</td>
<td>Grey, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall, Don James</td>
<td>Canning, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rea, Kerry Marie</td>
<td>Bonner, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripoll, Bernard Fernand</td>
<td>Oxley, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rishworth, Amanda Louise</td>
<td>Kingston, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO</td>
<td>Goldstein, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert, Stuart Rowland</td>
<td>Fadden, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise</td>
<td>Gellibrand, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael</td>
<td>Griffith, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell</td>
<td>Berowra, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffin, Janelle Anne</td>
<td>Page, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schultz, Albert John</td>
<td>Hume, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig</td>
<td>Maranoa, Qld</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secker, Patrick Damien</td>
<td>Barker, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorten, Hon. William Richard</td>
<td>Maribyrnong, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidebottom, Peter Sid</td>
<td>Braddon, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton</td>
<td>Cowan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil</td>
<td>Fisher, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn</td>
<td>Casey, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward</td>
<td>Lintiari, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael</td>
<td>Fairfax, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcott, Andrew John</td>
<td>Boothby, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy</td>
<td>Murray, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan, Jonathan Harold</td>
<td>Longman, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell</td>
<td>Lilley, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symon, Michael Stuart</td>
<td>Deakin, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanner, Hon. Lindsay James</td>
<td>Melbourne, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Craig Robert</td>
<td>Dobell, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Kelvin John</td>
<td>Wills, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor, Chris Allan</td>
<td>Flynn, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, Hon. Warren Errol</td>
<td>Wide Bay, Qld</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson</td>
<td>O’Connor, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh</td>
<td>Wentworth, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnour, James Pearce</td>
<td>Leichhardt, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale, Hon. Danna Sue</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vamvakinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments

- Clerk of the Senate—H Evans
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—IC Harris AO
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
RUDD MINISTRY

Prime Minister Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion Hon. Julia Gillard, MP
Treasurer Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government in the Senate Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Special Minister of State, Cabinet Secretary and Vice President of the Executive Council Senator Hon. John Faulkner
Minister for Finance and Deregulation Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP
Minister for Trade Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Defence Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP
Minister for Health and Ageing Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Minister for Climate Change and Water Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Attorney-General Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Human Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
### Rudd Ministry—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry / Position</th>
<th>MP/Senator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Home Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Bob Debus MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Chris Bowen MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Alan Griffin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Science and Personnel</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and</td>
<td>Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Justine Elliot MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Youth and Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare</td>
<td>Hon. Maxine McKew MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services and Parliamentary</td>
<td>Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>Hon. Bob McMullan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Duncan Kerr MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Byrne MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary Secretary for the</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Jan McLucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services</td>
<td>Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Government Service Delivery</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Shadow Treasurer
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation
Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Shadow Minister for Defence
Shadow Attorney-General
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors, Tourism and the Arts

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
The Hon Julie Bishop MP
The Hon Warren Truss MP
Senator the Hon Nick Minchin
Senator the Hon Eric Abetz
The Hon Joe Hockey MP
The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
The Hon Andrew Robb AO, MP
Senator the Hon Helen Coonan
Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion
The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP
The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson
The Hon Greg Hunt MP
The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Senator the Hon David Johnston
Senator the Hon George Brandis SC
The Hon John Cobb MP
Mr Michael Keenan MP
The Hon Dr Sharman Stone
Mr Steven Ciobo

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law
The Hon Chris Pearce MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer
The Hon Tony Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development and Cities
The Hon Bruce Billson MP

Shadow Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government
Mr Scott Morrison

Shadow Minister for Ageing
Mrs Margaret May MP

Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence
The Hon Bob Baldwin MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Mrs Louise Markus MP

Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare, Status of Women and Youth
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs
The Hon Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Training and Sport
Dr Andrew Southcott MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia
Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport
Mr Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development
Mr John Forrest MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and Resources
Mr Barry Haase MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector
Senator Mitch Fifield

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources and Conservation
Mr Mark Coulton MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
The Hon Peter Lindsay MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education
Senator the Hon Brett Mason

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and Public Security
Mr Jason Wood MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader in the Senate
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
CONTENTS

MONDAY, 25 MAY

Chamber
Employment and Workplace Relations Amendment Bill 2009—
  Message from Governor-General ................................................................. 4031
  Consideration of Senate Message .............................................................. 4031
Main Committee—
  Private Members’ Motions ........................................................................ 4033
  Days and Hours of Meeting ................................................................. 4033
Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Medical Devices and Other Measures) Bill 2008,
Law and Justice (Cross Border and Other Amendments) Bill 2009,
Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009 and
Health Workforce Australia Bill 2009—
  Referred to Main Committee ................................................................... 4033
Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010,
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2009-2010 and
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010—
  Second Reading .................................................................................... 4033
Ministerial Arrangements ............................................................................ 4059
Queensland And New South Wales Floods ................................................ 4059
Questions Without Notice—
  Economy ................................................................................................ 4061
  Economy ................................................................................................ 4062
Distinguished Visitors .............................................................................. 4063
Questions Without Notice—
  Economy ................................................................................................ 4064
  Infrastructure ....................................................................................... 4065
  Economy ................................................................................................ 4065
  Nation Building and Jobs Plan .............................................................. 4066
  Budget ................................................................................................. 4068
  Education Funding ............................................................................... 4068
  Economy ................................................................................................ 4069
Distinguished Visitors .............................................................................. 4072
Questions Without Notice—
  Infrastructure ....................................................................................... 4072
  Economy ................................................................................................ 4074
  Infrastructure ....................................................................................... 4075
  Northern Australia: Resources ............................................................ 4076
  Renewable Energy .............................................................................. 4078
  Budget ................................................................................................. 4079
  Budget ................................................................................................. 4080
  Budget ................................................................................................. 4081
  Indigenous Communities .................................................................... 4082
  Education ............................................................................................ 4083
  North Korea ........................................................................................ 4084
Samson And Delilah And Mr Charles ‘Bud’ Tingwell Am .................................. 4086
Auditor-General’s Reports—
  Reports Nos 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 of 2008-09 .................................... 4087
Documents ............................................................................................ 4087
CONTENTS—continued

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010,
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2009-2010 and
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010—
Second Reading.............................................................................................................. 4087

Petitions—
  Age Pension .................................................................................................................... 4145
  Australia Post: Wanneroo Post Office ................................................................. 4145
  Byron Bay Declaration ............................................................................................... 4145
  Indigenous Australians ............................................................................................... 4146
  Aboriginal Tent Embassy ............................................................................................ 4146
  Genocide ......................................................................................................................... 4146
  Gaza Strip ...................................................................................................................... 4146
  Toowoomba Bypass Project ...................................................................................... 4147
  Medicare: Dental Treatment ....................................................................................... 4147
  Parliament: Lord’s Prayer ........................................................................................... 4147
  Northern Territory: Bilingual Education .............................................................. 4148
  Religious Persecution ................................................................................................. 4148
  Therapeutic Goods Administration ........................................................................... 4148
  Permanent Residency ................................................................................................. 4149
  Child Support Scheme ............................................................................................... 4149
  Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme: Avastin ............................................................. 4149
  Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme ......................................................................... 4149
  Debt to Commonwealth ............................................................................................. 4150
  Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ................................................................................ 4150

Responses—
  Gaza Strip ...................................................................................................................... 4150
  Waterfall Gully Road ................................................................................................. 4151
  Millennium Development Goals ............................................................................... 4151
  Special Broadcasting Service .................................................................................... 4152
  Rent Assistance .......................................................................................................... 4153

Statements ..................................................................................................................... 4154

Committees—
  Economics Committee—Report ................................................................................ 4155
  Economics Committee—Report: Referral to Main Committee ............................. 4158
  Family, Community, Housing and Youth Committee—Report: ........................... 4158
  Migration Committee—Report .................................................................................. 4161
  Migration Committee—Report: Referral to Main Committee .............................. 4164

Private Members’ Business—
  Equal Rights and Opportunities .............................................................................. 4164

Adjournment—
  Hon. John Howard ..................................................................................................... 4168
  Queensland and New South Wales Floods ............................................................... 4169
  Kokoda Mateship Trek ............................................................................................... 4171
  Kokoda Mateship Trek ............................................................................................... 4172
  Petition: Murray-Darling River System ..................................................................... 4173
  International Students ................................................................................................. 4175
**Main Committee**

**Business—**

- Rearrangement ................................................................. 4177
- Law and Justice (Cross Border and Other Amendments) Bill 2009—
  Second Reading ................................................................. 4177
- Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009—
  Second Reading ................................................................. 4182

**Committees—**

- Communications Committee—Report .................................. 4201
- Treaties Committee—Report .................................................. 4205

**Statements by Members—**

- Blair Athol Accommodation and Support Program .................. 4209
- Petition: Higher Education .................................................. 4210
- Gippsland Electorate: Youth Allowance .................................. 4210
- Brother Richard Doheny FSP ................................................ 4211
- Cowan Electorate: Lake Joondalup Lifestyle Village ............. 4211
- Blair Electorate: Scenic Rim Community Hydrotherapy and Health Management Complex .................. 4212
- Seniors Health Card ............................................................. 4212
- Ms Ruby Wilson ................................................................. 4213
- Franchising ................................................................. 4213
- Australian Seabird Rescue ..................................................... 4214
- Australia’s Biggest Morning Tea ............................................. 4214
- St Dominic’s College .......................................................... 4214
- International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers .................. 4215

**Private Members’ Business—**

- ADF Personnel and ‘Undeclared Operations’ ......................... 4215
- Chronic Disease .............................................................. 4225
- Iran: Baha’i Detainees ......................................................... 4230

**Grievance Debate—**

- Roads ................................................................................. 4238
- Ms Sylvia Whalesmith ........................................................ 4240
- Mr John Armitage .............................................................. 4240
- Energy Efficiency ............................................................. 4242
- Green Energy ................................................................. 4242
- Western Sydney Transport ................................................... 4245
- Queensland and New South Wales Floods .......................... 4247
- Sport ................................................................................. 4249

**Questions In Writing**

- Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy: Moncrieff Electorate—
  (Question No. 588) ............................................................. 4253
- Health and Ageing: Moncrieff Electorate—(Question No. 590) ........ 4253
- Small Business—(Question No. 658) .................................... 4253
- Small Business—(Question No. 678) .................................... 4254
- Small Business—(Question Nos 679 and 680) ....................... 4254
The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 12 pm and read prayers.

EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Message from Governor-General

The SPEAKER (12.01 pm)—Order! I have received a message from Her Excellency the Governor-General dated 13 May 2009 recommending in accordance with section 56 of the Constitution an appropriation for the purposes of amendments of the Employment and Workplace Relations Amendment Bill 2008.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that this message should have been reported on 14 May 2009 prior to the House making the amendments requested by the Senate. The message had not been received at that time.

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate's amendments—

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (after table item 1), insert:
1A. Schedule 1, items 1 and 2 1 July 2009.
(2) Clause 2, page 2 (before table item 3), insert:
2A. Schedule 1, items 6 and 7 The day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.
2B. Schedule 1, items 8 to 13 The day after this Act receives the Royal Assent.
(3) Schedule 1, item 6, page 6 (line 19), omit “at or after the commencement of this item”, substitute “on or after 1 July 2009”.
(4) Schedule 1, item 7, page 6 (lines 25 and 26), omit “at or after the commencement of this item”, substitute “on or after 1 July 2009”.
(5) Schedule 1, page 6 (after line 28), at the end of the Schedule, add:
Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1992
8 Subsection 23(1) (definition of relevant amount)
Omit “29(3), (4) or (5),”.
Note: The heading to section 23 is altered by adding at the end “—Consumer Price Index”.
9 After section 23
Insert:

23A Indexation—Wage Price Index
Definitions
(1) In this section:
index number, in relation to a quarter, means:
(a) the Wage Price Index (total hourly rates of pay excluding bonuses/all sectors/all Australia/original) number published by the Australian Statistician in respect of that quarter; or
(b) if:
(i) a series of index numbers is prescribed for the purposes of this paragraph; and
(ii) the Australian Statistician publishes an index number in respect of the quarter; and
(iii) that index number belongs to the series;
that index number.
relevant amount means the amount specified in subsection 29(3), (4) or (5).
relevant year means:
(a) the financial year starting on 1 July 2009; or
(b) a later financial year.
Indexation
(2) If the indexation factor for a relevant year is greater than one, this Act has effect as if for each relevant amount there were substituted, on the first day of that...
relevant year, an amount calculated by multiplying by that factor:

(a) if, because of one or more other applications of this section, this Act has effect as if another amount or amounts were substituted for the relevant amount—the substituted amount or the last substituted amount; or

(b) in any other case—the relevant amount.

Indexation factor

(3) For the purposes of this section, the indexation factor for a relevant year is the number calculated, to 3 decimal places, using the formula:

\[
\text{Index number for the reference December quarter} \times \left(1 + \frac{\text{Index number for the base December quarter}}{100}\right)
\]

where:

- **base December quarter** means the last December quarter before the reference December quarter.
- **reference December quarter** means the last December quarter before the relevant year.

(4) If the number calculated under subsection (3) for a relevant year would, if it were calculated to 4 decimal places, end with a number greater than 4, the number so calculated is increased by 0.001.

Other provisions

(5) Subject to subsection (6), if at any time, whether before or after the commencement of this section, the Australian Statistician has changed or changes the reference base for:

(a) the Wage Price Index; or

(b) another index;

then, for the purposes of the application of this section after the change took place or takes place, regard is to be had only to the index number published in terms of the new reference base.

10 Paragraphs 29(3)(a) and (4)(a)

Omit “$151,167.84”, substitute “$412,000”.

11 Subsection 29(5)

Omit “$50.38”, substitute “$113.30”.

12 Application—compensation for the benefit of dependants

(1) The amendments made by items 8 and 9, to the extent that they relate to subsections 29(3) and (4) of the Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1992, apply in relation to the death of an employee that occurs on or after 1 July 2009.

(2) The amendment made by item 10 applies in relation to the death of an employee that occurs at or after the commencement of this item.

13 Application—compensation for the benefit of children

(1) The amendments made by items 8 and 9, to the extent that they relate to subsection 29(5) of the Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1992, apply in relation to a payment for a week that begins on or after 1 July 2009.

(2) The amendment made by item 11 applies in relation to a payment for a week that begins at or after the commencement of this item.
Dr KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water) (12.02 pm)—I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Private Members’ Motions

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 41(h), and the recommendations of the Whips adopted by the House on 13 May 2009, I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has been given by the members for Fairfax, Oxley and Leichhardt. These matters will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

Days and Hours of Meeting

The SPEAKER—I advise the House that the Deputy Speaker has fixed today, Monday, 25 May 2009, at 4 pm as the time for the next meeting of the Main Committee, unless an alternative day or hour is fixed.

THERAPEUTIC GOODS AMENDMENT (MEDICAL DEVICES AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2008

LAW AND JUSTICE (CROSS BORDER AND OTHER AMENDMENTS) BILL 2009

SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DIGITAL TELEVISION SWITCH-OVER) BILL 2009

HEALTH WORKFORCE AUSTRALIA BILL 2009

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (12.04 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

I can inform all honourable members that this motion is supported by the Chief Opposition Whip, the honourable member for Fairfax.

Question agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2009-2010

Cognate bills:

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2009-2010

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS) BILL (No. 1) 2009-2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 14 May, on motion by Mr Swan:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney (12.05 pm)—Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 is the appropriation bill for the biggest-spending government since World War II. At the back of the budget papers is set out in detail, as a percentage of gross domestic product, the scale of this budget in comparison with others. This budget represents 28.6 per cent of GDP. That is larger than the Hawke budget of 1984-85. It is significantly larger than the budgets in the early seventies of the Whitlam government which represented around 19 to 22 per cent of GDP. So the Rudd government has passed Gough Whitlam’s government and is the biggest-spending peacetime government in Australian history at 28.6 per cent of the economy. This is at a time when the recession that Australia is in is arguably not as deep as the 1990 recession, the early eighties recession or the 1970s recession. In fact, in the early 1990s, unemployment was higher for longer than is projected to be the case in this economic downturn, yet this government has gone into a deeper deficit and greater expenditure than any previous Australian government.
This leaves us with a record debt. The record debt comes about because the government is now spending far more money than it collects. In the coming year, the government will spend $57 billion more than it will receive, and it is intending to follow that course for some years to come. This is a government without any fiscal restraint. This is a government that does not know how to control its spending. That is because the government has no economic plan to get us through these difficult days.

Australia will perform better during this economic downturn because it went into it in better economic shape than it has previously. Australia went into this economic downturn with zero government debt. In fact, the government had significant net savings, particularly in the Future Fund where it had in excess of $50 billion. The government went into this downturn with unemployment at a little over four per cent, with a budget surplus in excess of one per cent of GDP and with growing and improving Chinese demand for Australia's resources. Of course, that has come off. But, having said that, Australia is in far better shape today than it may have been if the government of the coalition had followed previous governments and engaged in expenditure practices and reckless spending initiatives on a scale that other governments had followed before it. For example, this government in this year has increased its expenditure by 13½ per cent. In one year this government has increased its expenditure by 13½ per cent. Only the Whitlam government has come close to matching this. When the Whitlam government came in, it went on an expenditure binge on a significant scale. It could never reach the highs of the Rudd government as a percentage of GDP, but it gave it a good shake. In 1974-75, it increased government expenditure by nearly 20 per cent, and in the following year, 1975-76, it increased it by 15.7 per cent.

I refer Australians to a table on page 6, chapter 10, of the budget papers. They amount to more than a thousand pages and make gripping reading. That table clearly indicates that the average increase in government expenditure has been roughly in excess of two per cent since 1970-71 and well in excess of two per cent in many cases. Sometimes that increase in expenditure has been closely linked to individual initiatives, but the Rudd government says that it is going to increase expenditure across the board this year by 13.5 per cent and the next year by 3.9 per cent, and then it is going to go into a period of fiscal rectitude that would bring a grin to the face of the most mean-spirited chief financial officer or accountant out there that may still be breathing. After the next election, the Rudd government is going to go from being the biggest-spending government in modern Australian history to being the most fiscally prudent government in modern Australian history. What does that mean? It means that after the next election this government is going to deliver on its so-called strategy to bring the continuing budget deficit into surplus. So this government says in these budget papers that after the next election it is going to start to restrain its spending. It is going to show the fiscal restraint that it has not, to date, shown any indication of being able to achieve. Bear in mind, Mr Speaker, that the growth in expenditure in 2006-07, which was the last full budget year of the Howard government, was 2½ per cent. In 2007-08, it rose to 3.8 per cent. Some may say, 'Well, that was an election year.' Some might also point out, legitimately, that since the day Mr Rudd was elected Prime Minister he has committed $10 million an hour in new expenditure — new initiatives. Above and beyond pensions, defence, Medicare and all the day-to-day expenses of running the nation, the Prime Minister has committed $124 billion, averaging out at around $10 million
an hour, since the moment the Australian people elected him Prime Minister; yet the government believes that after the next election it will show fiscal restraint.

In fact, the government’s strategy is such that they say that when the economy recovers—and I will get to that in a moment—they promise to hold real growth in spending to two per cent a year until the budget returns to surplus. That is, they are going to show the sort of restraint—two per cent a year—that they have not been able to show to date. Having a fleeting glance at the budget papers, you can see, when you go through the individual portfolios, that the government would be embarking on an ambitious agenda of spending restraint should they go down that path. For example, the average annual growth in defence is projected to be 3.9 per cent; in public order and safety, the government say that real growth will be 2½ per cent over the next few years; in education it is impossible to work out what the real growth will be in expenditure because this year it has increased by 28.6 per cent, but they are going to show an increase of no more than two per cent after the next election; in health, with an ageing population, with greater health demands and with all the challenges in health, they say that the government are going to hold expenditure increases to two per cent; and in social security and welfare it is 1.7 per cent. We have not even talked about environment, climate change and the challenges of disease, viruses and war. All of that needs to be taken into account. The government expect the Australian people to treat this budget document as fact and see that it represents a strategy to recovery. It is a strategy to recovery that fails to take into account the tsunami of expectations in the Henry review of taxation and the tsunami of expectations in the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission report. I might add that the Prime Minister said that, if the hospitals are not fixed by the middle of 2009, he will have a referendum to take over the hospitals from the states. Of course, there is nothing in the budget papers about the potential cost of doing that. If the Prime Minister thinks that he can take over the entire hospital system without injecting one dollar of extra money into it, why would you hand it over? Why would the Australian people believe it?

The challenge in all of this is that, deficit after deficit after deficit, year after year of the government spending more money than it receives, year after year of the government borrowing money to fund its day-to-day activities and year after year of paying interest on that deficit, you get the debt. The debt is meant to be somewhere between $190 billion net debt and $315 billion gross debt, depending on the years and on whatever measurement the Prime Minister and the Treasurer tend to agree on on the day. The bottom line is that the Australian people have to pay. The Australian people will have a massive debt burden. If you take the $188 billion net debt figure, robbery though it is, that is a $9,000 debt that Australia did not have 18 months ago for every man, woman and child. Of that $9,000 debt, roughly $6,000 is because of expenditure and spending decisions by the Rudd government. So how are people going to feel? They receive their cheque for $900 on the one hand and then they get a bill for $9,000, plus interest, on the other. The good news is that you only pay $500 a year in interest on that $9,000—roughly, taking an average over the term.

So how are Australians meant to be able to repay that $9,000? The government expect that they will show spending discipline, that they will repay all of that money by being more careful with expenditure than they have shown to date by being more prudent with expenditure than any previous government has been over a similar electoral cycle, and—this is the clanger; this is the ‘Babe
Ruth hit out of the ground’—they expect the Australian people to believe that they are going to have economic growth that is faster and goes for longer than any other consecutive period in memory. So we are going to come out of this like a rocket—whoosh, straight out—even though the International Monetary Fund says this is going to be a long and protracted challenge and the Reserve Bank of Australia says it is going to be a long and slow recovery. The government expect the Australian people to believe that we are going to come out of this faster than anyone else, in better shape than anyone else and that they are going to pay off this debt sometime into the future.

But wait—there is more. Australia has reflected carefully on the fact that on budget night, for the first time in memory, the Treasurer stood at the dispatch box, spoke to the Australian people and did not have the courage to say what the deficit would be, let alone the debt. What interests me is that he would be the first Treasurer in Australian history—and I say this with absolute conviction—to stand at the dispatch box, deliver a budget speech and not mention tax cuts. These are tax cuts that are in the budget paper, $18 billion of tax cuts: ‘Oops, I forgot to mention them.’ Why? That is a good question. Why would the Treasurer stand here and deliver a budget with $18 billion of tax cuts but forget to mention them? This is one of the questions that will need to be answered over the next few days. We have a Treasurer who is delivering tax cuts and at the same time talking about the tough measures in the budget. He says that we have to do the hard yards to get the budget into surplus. How does this all stack up? It is a confused message. If we know one thing about the Labor Party in government it is that it is very good at messaging. It does not want to confuse people. You cannot talk about it being a tough budget but in the same breath mention tax cuts. You cannot talk about a plan to get the budget back into surplus, based on ambitious assumptions, and at the same time say that you are going to deliver $18 billion in tax cuts.

How does all this stack up? The fundamental point is that it does not stack up. Not only has the government spent all of the windfall of prudent economic management over the last 10 years, not only has it spent the proceeds of a mining boom, not only has it handed out cheques for $900; the government’s plan for recovery is fundamentally flawed because it cannot deliver on its spending restraint. The government cannot deliver on the economic growth forecasts. It cannot deliver on its projected revenue expectations over the next few years and its so-called plan to pay off Australia’s debt.

Do you know what the cost will be, Mr Speaker? The cost will be unemployment and jobs. The government says that unemployment will peak at around 8½ per cent. The fact of the matter is that it may well be higher. But all of the money that has been spent to date, including just over $22 billion in cash handouts, is the equivalent of what the government says is its nation-building agenda outlay over the next six years. All the cash handed out by the government in the last six months is roughly the equivalent amount of money it says will be the basis of nation building over the next six years—that is, $22 billion to $23 billion. That infrastructure is the government’s great white hope. That is what the government says will deliver that rocket-like recovery in the economy over the next few years. This is the biggest-spending government in Australia’s history. What is of even greater concern to the coalition is that there is no plan to get Australia out of this mess. The more the government sells its confused message the more that Australians worry that we are heading
into a deep, dark place without any chance of an emergency rescue.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women) (12.25 pm)—This is a nation-building budget. It supports jobs now and delivers the investments needed to strengthen the economy for the future. In my remarks on these appropriation bills I will be speaking to my particular areas of responsibility, for housing and housing affordability, and to some of the special measures in the budget which are of particular benefit to Australian women, in my role as Minister for the Status of Women.

An historic $22 billion will be spent on infrastructure around the country—on road, public transport, clean energy and university infrastructure. Many of the projects outlined in the budget papers are in or very near my electorate and will have benefits for many of my constituents, including the extra $100 million for a state-of-the-art cancer centre at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital at Camperdown, which comes on top of the $50 million already allocated for this lighthouse project. The centre will be a wonderful benefit not just to the people in my electorate. Australians certainly from all over New South Wales and perhaps from other parts of the country will be able to travel to Sydney to get the integrated cancer treatment and support that this new facility will offer. There is also $70 million for the Garvan Institute at St Vincent’s Hospital, which was a part of my electorate until recently. Many of the constituents I have are still reliant on St Vincent’s Hospital, and the Garvan Institute in particular does wonderful work not just for the people of Sydney but internationally. The institute is internationally renowned for its marvellous work.

In the area of education $48 million has been allocated to the College of Fine Arts in Paddington, which is also now outside my electorate but many of its students are residents of my electorate of Sydney. Certainly having the fine-arts college in Paddington really contributes to the life and vibrancy of that suburb. An investment of $50,000 to $200,000 has been allocated to each of the schools in my electorate from the Building the Education Revolution package, which is exciting. In the first funding round announcements I have heard of the success of Annandale North Public School, Annandale Public School, Balmain Public School, Birchgrove Public School, Bourke Street Public School, Cleveland Street Intensive English High School, Forest Lodge Public School, Fort Street Public School, Father John Therry Catholic Primary School, Glebe Public School, the International Grammar School, Lord Howe Island Central School—Lord Howe Island experienced some very bad weather recently and the SES was needed there—Newtown High School of the Performing Arts, Newtown North Public School, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Primary School, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary, Rozelle Public School, Sydney Grammar School, Sydney Secondary College Balmain campus, Sydney Secondary College Blackwell Bay campus, St Brendan’s School, St James Primary School, St Mary’s Cathedral School, St Mary’s School and St Scholastica’s College. All of those schools were successful in the first round of funding from the Building the Education Revolution. I am very excited about the extra investment those schools will see benefiting their students but also benefiting their local communities.

The budget also delivered on tax cuts that were announced in last year’s budget, keeping our commitment to hardworking Australians. There will be a significant boost to small business by increasing from 30 per cent to 50 per cent the investment allowance
for eligible assets, giving small business owners the confidence to invest in their businesses. We have heard a lot of anecdotal reports of businesses making investments in, for example, new transport and so on, which benefits not just the particular business itself but the suppliers of the goods from our local areas.

We have also delivered on pension reform. This is something that the opposition were very quick to embrace once they became the opposition. They had 12 years in government to deliver reform in this area but they were always too mean to do it. We have delivered an extra $32.49 per week for full-rate age, disability support, widow, carer and veterans pensioners, with couples receiving an extra $10.14. It is interesting also that, as well as never taking the opportunity to increase the age pension during their time in government, the opposition, when they became the opposition, as well as jumping on the bandwagon, saying that the age pension should be increased, did not just ignore the fact that they had had 12 years in which to do it but also excluded a vast number of pensioners. They agreed that there was work needed as to age pensioners but missed out disability pensioners, carers, veterans and other pensioners in their initial proposals. As well as pensions—which I will go back to in a little more detail later—500,000 carers around Australia will receive a new permanent carer supplement of $600 per annum to help them meet the significant financial challenges that they face. This is a much better approach than the one-off bonuses that were paid under the previous government on occasion, if the mood was there. This is something that carers can count on in the future.

The extension of the first home owner boost is the most significant new measure in my portfolio and it comes on the back of the terrific success of the first home owner boost. The first home owner boost has not just meant tens of thousands of young Australians are able to buy a home of their own when previously they had given up on the dream of home ownership; it also means work for tradespeople right across Australia. I see a lot of new developments and a lot of new building going on. I talk to builders and I talk to developers and they tell me that the first homeowners market, a negligible part of their work previously, has become a substantial part of their work. It varies, obviously, from state to state and from development to development. In many instances, they say, it is around 50 per cent—the lowest I have heard is now around 30 per cent—of their work and, up higher, 60 to 70 per cent of homes are being sold to first home buyers.

Of course, that has meant that the type of stock that is being built is different to what builders were building a few years ago. If you had a look at what builders were building a few years ago, you would have often seen four-bedroom homes with two bathrooms and a media room—large homes, typically aimed at homebuyers who had been in the market for some time and perhaps had older children or teenagers in the family. They are good homes for developers to build, because there is a higher profit margin in each house when you are building those larger homes. What we are seeing today is builders and developers really cutting their cloth to suit the market that is there at the moment. We are seeing more modest homes on smaller blocks of land, but they are a terrific way for someone to get into the housing market. They are a great way for someone who wants to buy a home of their own but is modest in their requirements to get into the housing market to pay off the bulk of that property and then think about something larger when their family begins to grow or their children are older.

The first home owner boost is staging down. We were concerned that ending the
boost suddenly would have had difficult consequences for developers and builders and would have potentially caused a rush towards the end of the period. So this staging down militates against those two outcomes. It is also worth remembering that there will be an ongoing building effect from the first home owner boost beyond 31 December, when it ends, because people will sign their contracts on 31 December and they then have 26 weeks for those homes to be built. So there will still be building generated by the first home owner boost beyond the notional end date of the boost.

As well as that new measure, there are several other important ongoing commitments within the budget, including $4.95 billion over four years for the National Affordable Housing Agreement and $2.01 billion over four years for the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and housing shortages. Some of the worst housing conditions, some of the worst overcrowding, is in Indigenous communities, particularly remote communities, and it is absolutely critical to our Closing the Gap targets that we address these issues of poor housing conditions and overcrowding. We have also set aside $525.6 million over four years for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, including $125.6 million for A Place to Call Home. A Place to Call Home, as you would recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, was a program that we went to the last election with, that we have now funded and that we are working with the states to deliver. Instead of homeless Australians moving into crisis accommodation and then moving on to transitional or medium-term accommodation and finally, perhaps, if they are lucky, getting longer term support through affordable private rental or public housing, A Place to Call Home places people who have been homeless immediately into the home that they will stay in for the long term. They get the support they need to stay in that property. For a victim of domestic violence it might be additional support workers to help with the needs of her kids and the counselling and support that is needed for her to re-establish her life. For people who perhaps have become homeless because of mental illness, it might be the personal support workers that they need to stabilise their condition and remain housed. Those houses then join the general pool of public housing in the state.

We have seen families moving into these A Place to Call Home properties already, as we have with our National Rental Affordability Scheme. The figure for the out-years for the National Rental Affordability Scheme is $1.04 billion. This is a scheme where, because of its initial 10-year commitment—each incentive is active for 10 years—the figures will change from year to year for the out-years of the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

I have had the fantastic pleasure of visiting the first tenants under the National Rental Affordability Scheme in many locations around Australia—people who are moving into these homes. One family that I visited in Leumeah had been living with the fellow’s mum for about three years. They were a couple with two young sons aged 11 and 13 when I met them. It was a two-bedroom property. The boys shared a room. They were so proud of their room. They took me to their room and showed me their DVDs and sporting trophies; both of them are great young sportsmen. These properties through the National Rental Affordability Scheme were purchased by St George Community Housing in an existing development of about 150 units. St George bought about 50 units. Nobody could tell which were the National Rental Affordability Scheme properties; they shared all the same facilities as the other
They certainly did not have any of the social difficulties or social stigma that we see in some of the large broadacre housing estates that were built 30 to 50 years ago. I cannot tell you how relieved this family were to finally have a place of their own. We turned up and there were rows of beautifully neat shoes, one next to the other, outside the door. I think I was possibly the first person who had ever walked on their carpet in shoes, they felt pride in the preciousness of having their own place so strongly. There is also the $459.8 million for the Housing Affordability Fund. It has been terrific to go and look at the sorts of proposals that have been funded under the Housing Affordability Fund and will continue to be.

Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, the ongoing work that we are doing in social housing is more critical than ever now because of the jobs that it generates and the housing that it provides at a time when people, particularly in the private rental market, are experiencing great difficulties, as you would have seen on the front page of the Daily Telegraph today. We have set aside $6 billion to build 20,000 new units of public housing around the country and $400 million for repairs and maintenance. I opened the first of the new public housing dwellings in Yennora on the weekend. The builders there told me that 52 separate tradespeople had worked on that property, including three apprentices. One of their apprentices had been put on because of the stimulus package work that they had got. It is a terrific outcome for them and it was a terrific outcome for the family that were moving into that new property as well. Jobs have been the main focus of this budget, as well as the social housing stimulus package. They have been a very important deciding factor in all of the investments that have been made.

Because of my role as the Minister for the Status of Women, I want to conclude by speaking a little bit about some of the measures that are of particular interest to Australian women. The historic investment of $731 million over five years for a comprehensive paid parental leave scheme is something that has been welcomed around the country. It is extraordinary. I must say that in my role as minister I have received curious questions about our lack of a paid maternity leave scheme from women’s ministers from other countries in international fora. This is a scheme whose time has well and truly come. The paid parental leave scheme will apply to births and adoptions after 1 January 2011.

It is interesting to look at who already had paid parental leave—or paid maternity leave in this case. Approximately half of all women who were employed already had some access to paid maternity or parental leave as part of arrangements negotiated with their employers, either in the public sector or in some private sector jobs. But, if you look at who was getting that leave, you see that less than a quarter of women on very low wages were eligible for that type of leave, whereas about three-quarters of women on high wages were eligible. It was terrific that many Australian women had already benefited from these schemes, but disproportionately, of course, it was women who had been on higher incomes in the lead-up to the births. In fact, the lowest level of access to paid parental leave was generally in areas that were female dominated, lower skilled and highly casualised. Of course, our scheme will be a huge benefit to those women in particular. Also, of course, about 74 per cent of full-time employees had access to paid parental leave, compared with only 32 per cent of part-time employees. That, again, is an area where it is very important to see change.
Our scheme, of course, will also help self-employed parents, contractors and casual workers. It involves—as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker—18 weeks paid leave at the federal minimum wage, which is currently $543.78 per week. That period of leave can be shared by both parents. There is an income test of $150,000 on the primary carer’s adjusted taxable income in the previous financial year. Some families will choose to stay on the current arrangements and receive the baby bonus and a family tax benefit because, of course, by changing to paid parental leave the family will miss out on the baby bonus and family tax benefit part B during that 18-week period. Families will be able to choose between those two options.

It is also worth reminding people that there will be a review in a couple of years time about whether paid paternity leave is also something that should be a feature of the Australian system and whether employers should contribute continuing payments for superannuation. We know that women are retiring with less superannuation than men—generally for baby boomers it is about half. There is something that we need to do over the long term to reduce that discrepancy. The reform to the pensions has made a huge difference there. About three-quarters of the people on single age pension are women. The increase to the single age pension is going to make a huge difference to those living on it, many of whom are women. Also, two-thirds of carer payment recipients are women, so the changes to pensions and to those benefits will have an ongoing effect that will reduce poverty in areas that are particularly female dominated.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (12.45 pm)—Two weeks ago, Australians witnessed the tale of two budgets. Over in Western Australia, where I come from, the Liberal-National government delivered a responsible budget with a budget surplus. It also introduced initiatives to support business, initiatives like a break from payroll tax over the next couple of years. So we were able to witness what a Liberal-National government can do in delivering a responsible budget in difficult economic times. Over here in Canberra, the Rudd government achieved what had previously been thought impossible. Its budget made even the Whitlam government look fiscally responsible. I know that Labor is about rewriting Labor Party history, but this—making the Whitlam government look fiscally responsible—was an extraordinary way to do it.

This government has certainly made history. In just 18 months, it has caused the biggest budget turnaround in Australian history. It took the budget from a $22 billion surplus to a deficit of $58 billion. That is the largest budget turnaround in living memory. And that will be legacy of this government: the fact that it lost control of the public finances just 18 months into its first term. The Rudd government has outspent all other governments that have gone before it. Government spending is now 29 per cent of GDP, making this the biggest-spending government in at least 50 years. On the question of debt, it has now run up the largest debt of any federal government in living memory.

But you would not have known this from budget night, because on budget night the government was desperately trying to hide from the Australian people the extent of the budget deficit and the extent of the mountain of debt that it will build up over the next few years. That is why the government has gone into overdrive in its spin, avoiding saying that the budget has a $58 billion deficit and that public debt will hit at least $300 billion.

We know that the budget deficit is the difference between what the federal government spends and the revenues that it receives in a particular year. When revenue exceeds
spending, we have a budget surplus; when spending exceeds revenue, we have a deficit. The former coalition government delivered surplus after surplus in its budgets, ensuring that our spending did not exceed our revenue. It is called ‘living within your means’ and the Australian people understand that you have to live within your means.

In fact, the Labor government used to believe in living within your means. Back 12 months ago, the Treasurer assured the Australian public that there would be a budget surplus of $22 billion in 2008-09. He assured the Australian people that revenues would exceed spending. The Australian people believed him, because in the lead-up to the last election the Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition, told the Australian public that he was an economic conservative and that he believed in budget surpluses. In fact, to drive home the point, he took out very expensive advertisements to tell the Australian people what we now know to be a lie: that he was an economic conservative absolutely committed to budget surpluses, the bigger the better. Yet at the first sign of trouble all fiscal responsibility has been thrown to the wind.

It was quite concerning that on budget night the Treasurer was not able to utter the phrase ‘$58 billion in deficit’. The whole point of a budget is to inform people of the state of the national finances and to provide forecasts and projections of what lies ahead. But not once in his 30-minute address to the people of Australia did the Treasurer tell them what they needed to know about the state of the budget: that it was in deficit to the tune of $58 billion. The Treasurer also could not bring himself to state the level of debt, whether net debt, gross debt or peak debt. He could not—he would not—nominate the figure of debt. And he certainly avoided being caught on camera saying that the unemployment figure was likely to reach one million. People have long memories. They recall that the last time one million Australians were unemployed was the last time that Labor was in government federally. Then, Prime Minister Keating ran up a $96 billion debt. People were astounded by the size of that debt and by the fact that a million people were unemployed.

This government has made that pale by comparison—pale into insignificance. The debt is not $96 billion; the unemployment figure is certainly likely to reach more than a million. But as for the debt figure, this is where it becomes quite curious. Having noticed that the Treasurer would not say the level of debt to which this government has committed the Australian people, we thought that perhaps the Prime Minister, who so often says he is ‘levelling with the Australian people’, would be honest enough to tell the Australian people the level of debt that this government has consigned us to. But it reached such farcical levels that it has almost become comical, ridiculous, the extent to which the Prime Minister and the Treasurer went to avoid telling the Australian people the level of debt to which they have committed each and every person in this country.

I think it is worth reading into Hansard this interview on Lateline on 19 May 2009. The Prime Minister was speaking to the Australian public on the ABC about the level of debt that Labor had managed to run up in just 18 months in government. The interviewer asked:

What’s the peak figure of the projected public debt in terms of tens or hundreds of billions of dollars in the coming years? What’s the peak figure?

The Prime Minister was asked for a figure. The Prime Minister:

Well, these are clearly outlined in the Budget papers and they’re usually expressed in terms of a
percentage of GDP. We peak, in around about 2013, at about 13.8 per cent of GDP.
The interviewer:
How much of that is in tens of billions or hundreds of billions of dollars; how much is that?
The interviewer, Tony Jones, was asking the Prime Minister to level with the Australian people and give them the figure. How much debt has this government assigned to the Australian people? We know that it is a mountain of debt. Say the figure. The Prime Minister:
Well, let me step back in terms of the elements of this. First of all, 70 per cent of our overall position here is determined by a $214-billion collapse in tax revenue. That’s one slice of it.
The interviewer:
OK. I understand - we understand that. So what is the figure of peak debt in hundreds of billions of dollars? What is the actual figure?
It was a very straightforward and simple question. By this stage the viewers must have been sitting on the edge of their chairs waiting to hear the Prime Minister say how much debt this country was going to accumulate under the Rudd Labor government. The answer:
Well, Tony, I’m about to come to that when I go to constituent parts. About $214-billion comes from a collapse in tax revenue and that is happening right across all the advanced economies across the world—
Blah, blah, blah it goes on.
… Then you go to the remaining third of it, which is made up of what we’re investing in infrastructure and other forms of temporary stimulus. And of that remaining one third of our total borrowings, the largest proportion is made up through infrastructure investment and the smallest proportion is made up through other forms of temporary stimulus. Put that altogether …
At this point the interviewer interrupts again. But all I’m asking for is one figure.
The Prime Minister, not to be outdone:
Well, I’m about to come to that, Tony. I’m taking you to the constituent parts. Put all that together and you’ll see clearly outlined in the Budget papers that we’re aiming to a gross figure of 13.8, which comes out at about $300 (billion). The Liberals have said about $275 (billion) and then they’ve failed to nominate or to support $22-billion of savings in the Budget, which makes our positions virtually identical. That’s the point I was making.
No, the point the Prime Minister was making is that he was too ashamed to admit to the Australian public that the figure he was grappling for was $300 billion. It did not get any better. The interviewer then said:
That figure is $300-billion, is that right?
What does the Prime Minister do?
As I said before, 13.8 per cent of GDP as described accurately in the Budget papers. There’s nothing new about that.
The interviewer put it so specifically:
TONY JONES: Is there a political spin rule which says the Prime Minister must not say that figure? Because it seems very hard to get you to say $300-billion.
The Prime Minister gave another evasive, prevaricating answer—refusing to say the words ‘$300 billion’. It was farcical. It certainly did not behave a Prime Minister of this country to be so prevaricating in his answer—and effectively mislead the Australian people and be so contemptuous of their intelligence. People understand the figure of $300 billion. Why was the Prime Minister avoiding any opportunity to have him say those words?
Apart from the fact that he confused net debt with gross debt and apart from the fact that the figures that he gave to the interviewer were not the accurate figures in the budget—apart from all that—this was an appalling example of evasiveness, dishonesty and not levelling with the Australian people. It continued all week to the point where the Prime Minister has made himself the subject
of ridicule, not only amongst cartoonists but also amongst more serious-minded journalists in this country.

That brings us to the point. The fact is that the Rudd government inherited the best economic conditions of any incoming government in the history of federal politics. There was no government debt—a totally no national public debt on the part of the federal government. That is because the previous coalition government had paid it off—every single cent. It took us 10 years to pay off $96 billion. We know the government already has in place a facility to borrow $200 billion and we know that the Prime Minister is now admitting to a figure of $300 billion in government debt, but has the government given us any idea of how it intends to pay back that $300 billion, let alone the interest that will accrue on it? We have not heard the Treasurer admit to the amount of interest.

It was rather interesting last week to read an analysis by the respected financial expert Ross Greenwood. This is what he wrote:

$200 billion is $200,000 million. The current 10 year Government bond rate is 4.67 per cent. I worked the loan out over a period of 20 years. Now here’s where it gets scary—really scary. The repayments on $200 billion come to more than one and a quarter billion dollars—every month—for 20 years. It works out we—as taxpayers—will be repaying $15.4 billion in interest and principal every year … $733 for every man, woman and child—every year.

That is just the interest.

The total interest bill over the 20 years is—get this—$108 billion.

Ross Greenwood goes on to say:

And remember, this is a Government that just 18 months ago had NO debt … NO debt. In fact it had enough money to create the Future Fund to pay the future liabilities of public servants’ superannuation … and it had enough to stick $20 billion into the Building Australia Fund last year … So in 18 months not only has the government racked up the largest debt in living memory but the interest repayments on that debt, according to Ross Greenwood, are $108 billion over 20 years. That is money that will not go to schools, hospitals, roads and infrastructure. When you drive the country into debt and borrow $300 billion, interest accrues and the interest has to be paid back year after year and the principal has to be paid back. And who is going to pay it back? The government does not have any money of its own. The government gets the money from the taxpayers, so the taxpayers of Australia will be paying for this government’s profligacy and for the fact that this government has spent more than it earned, that this government has borrowed to go into debt and that this government has no plan, no exit strategy and no idea how to get the country back on an even keel, how to get the budget back into surplus or how to pay off that debt.

In the budget papers there were some simply unbelievable assumptions that the government asked us to make. First of all they said they were going to return the budget to surplus on the following assumption: no government will undertake any new spending until 2017. That is simply unbelievable, but that is the assumption the government wants us to make. The second assumption is that there will be an unprecedented run of growth at 4½ per cent for at least two years and a projection of above-trend growth for another four consecutive years. These are, at best, the most optimistic figures that anybody is putting forward, and a fiscally conservative government would be looking at options that are achievable, not the wildest options that you can come up with. There have been only two periods in the last 50 years where growth of 4½ per cent has been maintained, and that has only ever been for two years at a time. So the assumptions that we are being asked to make—
that there will be no new government spending until 2017 from a government that has spent billions of dollars since it was first elected and that growth will be above historic levels for the next six years or more—make the plan to return this budget to surplus just a fantasy. The Australian people know that and, had it not been for the government’s ridiculous spin in refusing to say $300 billion of debt and a $58 billion deficit, this government should not be standing here delivering a budget of this kind in this environment.

There are some other areas of great concern where the coalition have said that this is not the way to bring the budget back into surplus. One of those is private health insurance. Private health insurance is part of the private health system. We need a strong private health system in this country to keep the public health system strong. We need to ensure that there is a balance between private health and public health. The public health system on its own could not cope if all the people in private health insurance went into public health. The people most affected would be the lower income people, those in the lowest socioeconomic levels in Australian society. They would be negatively affected by an imbalance between private health insurance and public health. Private health insurance is so important because it keeps people in private health, yet for ideological reasons this government chose to attack private health insurance rebates as a means of coming up with savings. It tells you that this government’s priorities are all wrong. This government’s priorities are about ideology, not about sensible, reasoned, logical budget planning. This government will go down in history as the biggest spending one, as the government that has driven the country into the biggest debt that this country has ever seen. (Time expired)

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (1.05 pm)—Listening to the speech by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition makes me wonder why they do not make her shadow Treasurer—oh, I’m sorry. They tried that already! This is a forward-looking federal budget that seeks to stimulate the economy to preserve jobs.

Ms Julie Bishop—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder if it is necessary for the member for Wills to be so venal and personal.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—It is not a point of order.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—it also sets out to address the unsustainable spending from the previous government. The current apocalyptic argument that the opposition is running on debt levels is a cynical political ploy to instil fear in the electorate, and this at a time when the economic imperative is to generate confidence, not fear, in the community and business, which the government has already endeavoured to achieve with the stimulus packages we introduced.

It is important to consider both the budget deficit and net debt figures as a percentage of GDP, as this exposes the hysteria being peddled by the opposition. Even after accounting for revenue downgrades, the government’s financial position remains one of the strongest in the world. Our projected levels of net debt are lower than any of the advanced major economies, with a forecast peak of 13.8 per cent of GDP in 2013-14 compared with an estimated 81 per cent of GDP for the 25 largest advanced economies collectively—that is to say, 13 per cent compared with over 80 per cent. The projected net debt for the United States and the United Kingdom is 83 per cent of GDP in 2014, while Japan has forecast net debt of 136 per cent of GDP in 2014. Furthermore, net debt in Australia is projected to fall back to 3.7 per cent of GDP by the end of the medium-term projections in 2019-20.
The budget deficit for 2009-10 of $57.6 billion represents 4.9 per cent of GDP, which is less than half the collective deficit of 10.9 per cent for the major advanced economies and much smaller than the 8.8 per cent of GDP collective deficit for all advanced economies. A natural recovery in revenues and spending restraint is expected to see the budget return to surplus by 2015-16.

This budget builds on the objective of restoring confidence and preserving jobs, with targeted infrastructure spending, while also delivering economic justice, with a paid parental leave scheme and a substantial increase in pension payments. A $22 billion investment in nation-building infrastructure is, I think, the centrepiece of the 2009-10 budget. It includes $4.6 billion to improve nine metropolitan rail networks in six of Australia's major cities, including $3.2 billion towards a rail link from West Werribee to Southern Cross Station and $40 million towards the east-west rail tunnel linking Footscray to the CBD. There is a $4.5 billion investment in the Clean Energy Initiative to assist Australia's transition to a low-carbon economy and to help us build the jobs of the future. It includes up to four large-scale solar electricity generation projects. There is $1.5 billion in recurrent funding for universities and students, including $491 million over four years to uncap the number of public university places from 2012, which, I think, is a terrific measure. This will facilitate an increase in places from next year, with an extra 50,000 students commencing university courses by 2013. There is also $394 million of new funding over four years to encourage greater participation by low-income students in higher education, along with greater support for lower income students.

The government has found room, under difficult economic circumstances, to deliver an increase to pension payments for singles of $32.49 per week and there is a $10.14 per week combined increase for couples. This is a significant initiative; it is very relevant to my own electorate. In my budget reply speech last year I spoke of the financial plight of pensioners and I detailed the concerns and efforts of the Moreland Seniors Action Group, amongst others.

The infrastructure spending in education also fits in well with speeches that I made in parliament last year, particularly the need to give priority to disadvantaged young Australians in accessing a university education in order to address skills shortages rather than trying to meet our skills needs by increasing the number of skilled migrants.

The spending on rail infrastructure will also address the neglect by the previous government and reverse what I think is essentially backward thinking by National Party transport ministers, who invariably take the view that the Commonwealth government should not support urban public transport.

The federal budget of 2009-10 is working in tandem with the Reserve Bank of Australia and monetary policy by running a countercyclical budget deficit to support aggregate demand in the economy. It is a responsible policy response to allow the budget balance to adjust to short-term movements in the economic cycle and not undertake a slash-and-burn approach that would offset this adjustment and be inherently procyclical and make the economic downturn worse. If we adopt a pro-cyclical approach—if we engage in slash and burn—this would exacerbate the impact of the global recession on the Australian economy; it would lead to a greater loss in output, it would lead to unemployment and it would lead in the medium term to a higher budget deficit.

The measures outlined in the budget are consistent with the commitment by G20 countries to deliver the fiscal stimulus necessary to restore growth. The most effective
fiscal stimulus measures are those that provide the largest boost to aggregate demand when it is most needed and they include measures to stimulate household, business and infrastructure spending.

Spending on infrastructure not only has a multiplier effect on economic output but also improves the productive capacity of the economy in the longer term. The OECD has found that Australia’s fiscal stimulus measures are among the most effective in the OECD in terms of stimulating economic activity and supporting employment. It has found that the first phase of Australia’s fiscal stimulus provided an immediate and significant boost to household incomes, which contributed to retail sales growth. It has also found that the second phase of fiscal stimulus, which focused on infrastructure investments, could be implemented within a relatively short time frame while the third phase, which was outlined in this budget, moves to major economic infrastructure projects. It further found that Australia’s fiscal stimulus measures are expected to have a substantial impact on economic output and employment by boosting GDP and reducing the forecast peak in the unemployment rate. This is in stark contrast to the record on fiscal policy of the previous government, which, despite numerous warnings from the Reserve Bank, continued to run a pro-cyclical budgetary policy that fanned inflation and pushed against the best efforts of the Reserve Bank and monetary policy to contain inflationary pressures.

As I have mentioned in the parliament before, of the $334 billion budget windfall delivered by the resources boom during the period from 2004 to 2007, $314 billion—that is, nearly all of it—had been matched by increased spending for tax cuts. The writer George Megalogenis reported on the previous government’s record as follows:

What is clear with hindsight is that the Coalition wrote cheques to the electorate that would bounce once the mining boom turned to bust. A study by the Weekend Australian revealed that a dramatic shift occurred in the tax mix between 2003-04 and 2007-08 whereby both company tax and capital gains tax collections surged, but not permanently. When the global recession hit, revenue collections from these sources collapsed to their pre-boom levels leaving a $20 billion hole in the federal revenue base.

In total, there has been $173 billion worth of downward revisions over the four years to 2011-12, equivalent to 14 per cent of total taxation receipts. Company taxation and capital gains tax account for around $90 billion and around $30 billion respectively of these revisions. Adding an estimate of the downward revision for the newly included year of 2012-13 takes the downward revisions across the five years of forward estimates to around $210 billion.

The surge in revenue in the minerals boom was squandered by the coalition in unsustainable handouts between 2004 and 2007, leaving what has been described as a structural deficit. Along with a foreign debt legacy of $658 billion, or around 60 per cent of GDP, the Liberal Party today has the political gall to be pontificating about debt, having left Australia exposed to economic imbalances of persistent current account deficits, heavy net external indebtedness and an elevated household debt-to-income burden. The member for Higgins is speaking in the public domain about how you do not need to wait for a financial crisis to fund infrastructure and then, remarkably, stating that this is the ongoing business of government. This is truly remarkable given his record—his lack of courage in standing up when he was Treasurer to Prime Minister Howard. In the biography on John Howard’s prime ministership, the member for Higgins revealed that
the 2001 business activity statement simplification exercise in response to a small business outcry was nothing more than window dressing, but the member for Higgins failed utterly to curb the middle-class welfare and various election bribes former Prime Minister Howard engaged in after 2002. I again quote George Megalogenis: Howard and Costello took middle-class welfare to absurd heights to win the 2004 election. In that year, they drove the handout line—by which Mr Megalogenis means the proportion of the nation’s income derived from government payments—past 16 per cent for the first time on record.

Treasury papers show that from 2002-03 onwards the structural budget balance deteriorated, moving into structural deficit in 2006-07. All the while, the individual indebtedness of Australians and Australia’s national foreign indebtedness blew out—skyrocketed. In those years, we had a profligate Prime Minister and a lily-livered Treasurer. Mr Howard’s statement that Prime Minister Rudd should be thanking him every night for the economy he, Mr Rudd, inherited is, frankly, just laughable. There were no fewer than 20 separate warnings about capacity constraints driving inflationary pressures from the Reserve Bank over the period 2004 to 2007, but these warnings went unheeded by the former Treasurer. His legacy was an infrastructure shortfall during the resources boom, while presiding over an extravagant growth in Commonwealth grants. For example, in 2004 there were 12,000 grants totalling $729 million but, by 2007, there were 49,000 grants worth more than $4.5 billion, more than five times as much.

The increase in real spending over the four years to June 2008 was the biggest four-year increase since the aftermath of the 1990s recession but occurred at a time when savings were required to mitigate the overheating economy or where spending should have been targeted to address skills shortages, lack of capacity and infrastructure constraints. The former Treasurer was either incapable or unwilling to rein in the spending of his Prime Minister and other ministers. The Liberals and their doctrine of trickle-down economics gave us Work Choices; yet, paradoxically, they were profligate in government spending and failed to address the fundamental weaknesses in fiscal policy and the economy at large.

By contrast, the Labor government is driven by a sense of fairness. It is uncluttered by obsolete doctrines that have caused this economic downturn and that brought hardship upon productive businesses, workers and families. The government has brought down a budget which aims to restore government finances to sustainable levels in the long term and promote a culture where Australians understand that welfare should be directed to those in genuine need, rather than splashed around as a political bribe. This government is delivering practical and appropriate measures through fiscal policy which, in conjunction with monetary policy, seeks to promote economic recovery in Australia.

I return to three areas of the budget which I am particularly enthusiastic about and which I have spoken about and campaigned for in recent times. The increase for single pensioners and pensioner couples—$32.49 per week for single rate pensioners and $10.14 for couples—is something which I referred to in my speech on the appropriations last year. I pointed out the efforts of Gino Iannazzo and Vic Guarino, representatives of the Moreland Seniors Action Group, who did a lot of campaigning about this issue last year. I talked about the way in which pensioners had lost spending power since the introduction of the GST and, in particular, how they had been losing spending power in
the course of the last three years. The government also introduced more assistance for carers at a total cost of $1.8 billion over five years. I need to bring to the attention of the House the fact that the Moreland Seniors Action Group and others have spoken to me about the budget increase for couples and expressed concern about whether this increase will be adequate for them. I have also mentioned in the House previously that I think we should be looking to lift the couples rate relative to the singles rate. I know that the increase in the singles rate is motivated by compassion, is well meaning and is motivated by concern for the present circumstances of single pensioners, but I think the fact that two can live more cheaply than one makes this a more desirable household formation which should not be penalised.

I think the community would have fewer problems of loneliness and isolation and a more efficient use of housing and other resources if we had fewer single-pensioner households and more pensioners living together or with family and friends who could provide them with financial and emotional support—and, let me add, vice versa. It cannot be said too often that many grandparents and great-grandparents are important sources of mentoring, childminding and other support which adds value to families and communities. So I think this is an area where we need to get the right policy outcome, and I do not think it is good for people to live alone. I think that companionship, support and the pooling of physical, financial and emotional resources is a good thing and that people caring for each other and sharing the load is a good thing. I would like to see—and I note that the Moreland Seniors Action Group and others in my electorate have also said to me that they would like to see—the couples pension rate approach that of the singles rate rather than having these things get further and further apart.

I also want to draw attention to the funding for the urban public transport projects. I mentioned earlier the $3.2 billion towards a rail link from West Werribee to Southern Cross Station and $40 million towards the east-west rail tunnel linking Footscray to the CBD of Melbourne. This is something that I mentioned in parliament last year and I supported the work of the activist group GetUp, which has been campaigning for spending on urban public transport for a variety of reasons. It is regrettable that the previous government was not prepared to invest in urban public transport. The history of the other side has been that the National Party has always had the transport portfolio and the National Party minister has never supported funding for urban public transport. This is regrettable. There are very serious problems of congestion in our major cities—Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and others—and to address those problems adequately requires substantial infrastructure investment. I am delighted to see that this budget includes those measures.

I also wish to support the amount of money which is being put into increased university places. I think the idea that we can have an extra 50,000 students commencing university courses by 2013 is terrific. In conclusion, this is a nation-building budget which lays the foundations for a stronger and more prosperous future.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.25 pm)—This budget we are debating in the parliament is a budget of debt and deficit. It is a budget most notable for its wheel spinning and word spinning. About the most accurate thing that the Treasurer had to say on budget night was that we do indeed need to steel ourselves for the future. What he did not add...
was that this is a budget that risks stealing our future, and this is why the opposition parties have sought to shine a light on what is in the budget, as this government and its members find it difficult to actually talk about the facts.

A budget is ordinarily a statement of our financial position. That is the most basic thing that a budget does. Yet what is quite remarkable is that on budget night that was the last thing the Treasurer wanted to talk about. He did not want to talk about some of those downright frightening figures, to be honest with you, that are captured in this budget document. You have seen Labor members so indoctrinated with the word spinning and the political game playing that has characterised this government so comprehensively after only a year and a half that they could not actually come to the dispatch box and speak about what is in the budget and what it amounts to in terms of a financial statement and a financial position for our nation.

For those who are interested, let me just share some very basic facts. After this Labor spending spree—an unprecedented spending spree over the last 18 months—this budget anticipates one million people being out of work by 2010-11, record budget deficits of $58 billion and a new, never before visited, stratospheric amount of net Commonwealth debt of $188 billion by 2012-13. These are the key statistics that could not be mentioned on budget night, and so deep has the indoctrination gone that even this morning a Labor member, the member for Petrie, when asked about the deficit that is in the budget—a key figure, a bottom-line, crucial piece of information—found herself unable to describe what it was. ‘I don’t know the budget deficit figure,’ she said. ‘I don’t know the deficit figure.’ She was asked, ‘What is the deficit figure?’ ‘I don’t know the deficit figure’ was her answer. So deep has this Labor indoctrination gone that not only are they not allowed to talk about the budget deficit but clearly they are not allowed to think about it or even remember it.

It is a key economic statistic that gives the Australian community a sense of where our financial position is as a nation and the frightening trajectory that it has been put on by this recklessly spending Rudd Labor government. So these crucial pieces of information do give us an insight into the future, a future that will see us going into red ink in amounts and depths we have never visited before. As we hear Labor members in this parliament talk about the budget, we do not hear them talking about that budget outcome, that net position. You hear attacks on the former Howard government—almost like they are living in the past. You hear this rhetoric about plans for this and plans for that. We heard a lot about reforms in the lead-up to the election, but we knew that Labor reform actually meant spending more money. Where to now for those reform undertakings that Labor gave the electorate when there is not the surplus or savings legacy gifted to them by the former Howard-Costello government?

The budget really takes Australia from being alert and quite anxious about our economic future and the competency of the Rudd government to manage this economy into a time when we need to be genuinely alarmed about the deterioration of our national finances and what that means for the future prospects of our nation and Australian citizens. It is so frightening that the Treasurer could not even talk about some of those key economic statistics that give us a snapshot of just where we are.

Instead we hear a lot of other numbers being bandied around—and I will touch on some of those. For those people who follow sport, think about the key statistics that you
see for the players. You could say that Prime Minister Rudd was a high-order draft pick who promised much. He did not have a lot of form to go by, but he was happy to claim credit for the good performance of those around him and say that it was all his handiwork and then offer himself to the Australian people. When you see this Prime Minister’s player profile, you recognise that he does not go in for the hard balls. He does not go in and make the hard decisions. He is, in sporting parlance, a receiver. He has received the savings and surpluses of the former Howard government and has patted himself on the back even though he opposed those savings and surplus measures every step of the way. I remember his speech on the GST, in which he urged us not to venture into flowery rhetoric. He referred to it as ‘fundamental injustice day’—so prone is our Prime Minister to flowery rhetoric and overblown statements.

The Prime Minister is a receiver. He has received the financial circumstances that our nation and the Howard-Costello government worked hard to achieve. He has grabbed that legacy of savings and surplus with both hands, despite his opposition, and has gone about spending it as quickly as he could. So the fruits of that sound economic management represent the opportunities gifted to the Rudd government to apply those resources that others have worked so hard to make available. The Prime Minister has not only applied those resources but has swallowed them whole. He has grabbed them with both hands and swallowed them whole. We have seen a binge of spending ever since the Rudd government came into power.

The member for Wills spoke at length about the impact of the mining boom. He was critical that the Howard government had overseen an era of such prosperity. He referred to George Megalogenis’s article but did not go so far as to mention that journalist’s conclusion that capital and business had not been taxed enough. It was interesting that the member for Wills left that little conclusion out when he spoke about those figures. But he failed to say that the Rudd government is simply spending those proceeds which were overseen, nurtured and supported in the Howard-Costello years. The Labor government have not only spent the proceeds from that boom but have committed to spending the proceeds of booms to come—and this is what is so worrying. In the budget figures, they anticipate an era of herculean economic growth to get us out of the debt and deficit spiral that the Rudd Labor government have put us in. They anticipate a rate of growth that would be unprecedented and quite remarkable in Australia’s economic history, a rate of growth that would leave behind other periods of growth as if they were not really trying. These incredibly optimistic assertions—and that is being as kind as we can be—are what Labor offer as a way out of the debt and deficit hole they have put the nation and the Australian community into. And they assume that we will bounce back brighter and bolder than we were previously.

I have listened to successive Labor members being critical of the recent extended period of growth overseen by the coalition under then Prime Minister Howard and then Treasurer Costello. They have been critical of that time and the opportunity to invest those funds. The Labor Party are putting out a confusing message to the Australian public. Wheel spinning and word spinning have become what the Labor government are best known for. They have a plan, strategy and language designed to protect their short-term political interest but no plan for the nation, no coherent strategy for carrying the nation forward.

But we are seeing spending. Some two-thirds of the projected deficits and the accumulating debt that result from them are the
result of new spending announcements by Prime Minister Rudd and his recklessly spending Labor government. I have heard that this government have committed to some $10 million of new spending every hour since they were elected. This is extraordinary. On some of the things they claim great credit for in their stimulus package the coalition has put forward a very coherent and prudent alternative strategy. Instead we have this spendathon, this cash splash, which is making Australians increasingly aware that the Rudd government are looking a bit like a payday lender: you might get your $900 in the short term—and most people would be pleased about that—but the debt and deficit that result from these spending commitments will see interest rates attacking every Australian to the tune of about $500 a year. That is just to pay the interest on the debt and deficit that the Rudd Labor government have accumulated. Isn’t that interesting—$900 now and $500 a year in interest payments for as far as the eye can see? For this government, that amounts to an economic strategy!

I hope this government reflects on some of the things that it is saying. It talks about, and is a very self-congratulatory about, its plan for infrastructure, as if this has never happened before. Labor members are keen to refer to the *Australian* newspaper. But let us have a look at some of the work that is in the *Australian*. On May 13, there is very insightful and analytical work by Lenore Taylor in which she talks about just what the composition of the so-called nation-building and infrastructure showpiece of the budget is. She quite rightly points out that the vast majority of its resources is a result of the coalition government’s work and Labor is simply spending it. And then the Rudd government, through the Deputy Prime Minister and others, has the gall to attack coalition members for participating in activities that relate to the spending of the surplus and savings from the coalition’s time in government, as if we are somehow not worthy or deserving of being involved. This is quite remarkable. It is spending money that has been worked hard for and prudently managed by the former government and contributed to by the enterprise and thoughtfulness of the Australian community. Coalition members have every right to do this. In fact, there is a moral duty for coalition members to be involved in the application of those funds, because that is where the hard work was done to make those resources available.

So this is the story that we are getting from the Labor Party: everything is sweet and hunky-dory but they will not dare talk about what the key financial statistics tell us about where the nation is at and the direction in which we are heading. There is the spin of wheels and words. There is great talk and the re-announcement of projects. They announce them again and then there is another announcement with a slight nuancing of the language—and that substitutes for forward-looking, sound and coherent government strategy.

This is a budget where the consequences, the only sure thing that we can absolutely recognise, are debt and deficit in proportions we have never seen before; where the Treasurer rightly urges us to steel ourselves while he and the rest of the Rudd government are stealing our future; and where reform is being retreated from because, in Labor’s eyes, reform is always about spending more money.

Now that they have spent all that the coalition left them in surplus and savings and have plunged us into a new era of debt and deficit, they are wondering where their money is going to come from. We know where it is going to come from; it is going to come from the Australian public. We know that, long after the Rudd government has
been written off by history as the cruellest experiment after the Whitlam era, the Australian people will still be carrying its financial legacy. As young people enter the workforce they will face the risk of bracket creep, because that is how the Rudd government wants to increase its revenues; changes to their superannuation so that there is a lack of certainty about how to plan for retirement; and a Rudd Labor government that is so hostile to incentives that employee share ownership schemes are under attack—one of the very mechanisms that best align employers’ and employees’ interests in seeing the success of the company. Those young people know that they will work harder, and they will have to work harder for the Commonwealth to generate the income to start paying for the interest so that we can again get to a point, I hope, where the Commonwealth is net debt free.

When the charts come out after the budget, those pie charts with different colours that give you an idea of where the money is coming from and where the money is going, there will be two new wedges on those pie charts. On the income side, you will see debt and deficit—how we will not be paying our own way, as is the case here. We are living today by creating financial burdens for the future. That will be the new wedge on the income side. On the expenditure side, you will see the big social security, health and defence wedges and then you will see a new big wedge. That will be interest rates, that will be debt servicing and that will be an enormous impost on the budget year in, year out, for as far as the eye can see.

Then we will be told that that was all a product of investment in infrastructure. Well, hooey to that. That is completely false, it is a lie, and I think the Australian public are realising that the more they see the photo opportunities at these choreographed events where people in hard hats revisit the same site over and over again to re-announce the same project over and over again. People will look back and say, ‘Under the Howard-Costello government, the AusLink 2 program that the National and Liberal parties put in place envisaged $31 billion of road and rail infrastructure over five years.’ And then they will look at this Rudd budget and see road and rail infrastructure—their big nation-building plans—at $26 billion over six years. So we are actually seeing a reduction in effort on those key pieces of infrastructure that the Labor Party hold up as the centrepiece of this budget, a reduction in effort in those key areas that go to building productive infrastructure for our economy and helping to improve our prospects for the future.

But you will also hear stories about the discipline that has gone into choosing which projects have been successful and which have not. Infrastructure Australia, a very credible and talented group of people genuinely working, I believe, in the national interest, brought forward their recommendations only to find the budget has inclusions that they have never considered and exclusions for which there is no explanation and no justification. We have heard that embarrassing story where the transport minister in South Australia, the day after the budget, was asked just what the extension of the O-Bahn was all about. It was of the order of $61 million, if I remember correctly. He was like, ‘Ah, er, um,’ a bit like a Labor member being asked what the deficit is: either he never knew or he had been told not to know. What we clearly know is that that reaction hardly represents a commitment to a project that has been developed through analysis and objective assessment. So that project has popped up. It may well be worthwhile; we just do not know.

Where is the transparency? Where is the objectivity? Where is the evidence based decision making? How does a project fall out...
of the sky, appear in a capital works agenda that has supposedly been nuanced and analysed to within an inch of its life, and then pop up in the budget, when the key proponent, the state government to whom that money has been allocated, does not know the first thing about it? How rigorous is that? And what of the rest of the projects? What of the commitments that Sir Rod Eddington, through his work in Victoria, identified as key priorities that are not funded in this budget? There is one close to me, the Frankston bypass. It was recommended—not a cent. We are not sure why that is. There is no explanation, no undertaking to provide a transparent justification. It was just left out and then others were put in.

At a time when we have already seen a forward agenda that envisages funding commitments but does not actually provide for them, just where is that money going to come from? Is this the end of infrastructure investment under the Rudd government, under their so-called disciplined ‘no more than two per cent growth in expenditure’ plan? Where are all the rest of the resources coming from? Is this a statement in time, and now all the Infrastructure Australia people can do something else with their time, energy and resources? We just do not know.

So much for transparency and openness. We do not know just what is happening with those infrastructure projects, after hearing up hill and down dale that these were the centrepiece of the recent Rudd budget—even though they represent a reduction in effort of $5 billion in terms of the forward commitments over a longer period of time. These are just some of the many mysteries we are faced with in this budget.

There is another thing we need to touch on in terms of my own portfolio responsibilities. Many in this place share a great commitment to sustainability, but Australians with that interest will be left scratching their heads, because the Rudd government once again have rebranded existing programs and moved money around like the pea and thimbles trick, not only because they want you to guess where the money actually is but because they want you to believe it is under each of the thimbles. These programs, about 10 of them at least, have been axed or wound back under this budget. Some of them had not survived one year. They had not progressed past the political spin of an announcement. The only tangible outcome from some of these sustainability related programs were press releases. We will come back to this topic, along with just how wisely some of the money is being spent, particularly given the growing concern and in some cases outright outrage about how some of the Building the Education Revolution funding is being used.

But for those that really want to have a look at this budget, just think about it for what it is. It is a budget that commits our nation to a debt and deficit strategy that we have never seen before, where red ink is there for as far as the eye can see. Its strongest and most common element is its wheel spinning and word spinning, where the mantras are being trotted out over and over again but they dare not speak about the true financial position that this budget puts us in, nor the trajectory that it puts us on. The Treasurer was right when he said in this budget, ‘We need to steel ourselves’, because under this budget the Rudd Labor government is stealing our future. And I, for one, am not prepared to see it given away.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (1.45 pm)—I rise in support of the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and the Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010. Unlike the member for Dunkley, I realise that we need a budget with nation building for recovery as its centrepiece. We need
an economy that is stimulated and helps cushion Australia from the full impact of the global recession while also laying the foundation for a strong and more prosperous future, a budget that realises that we need to build, and build upon infrastructure. Unfortunately the previous government did not do this.

On a national level, this is a budget that focuses on supporting jobs today by building the infrastructure we need tomorrow. We are committing to a historic $22 billion investment in national infrastructure including $4.6 billion to improve rail networks across Australia; $3.4 billion to upgrade highways across the country; $3.2 billion for public hospital infrastructure, modern cancer services and medical researchers. Part of this will be used for the Peter MacCallum Institute in Victoria, and that is a great boost for our state. There is $1.5 billion for new solar technologies including up to four large-scale solar generation projects; $399 million to expand port infrastructure to boost Australia’s exports; and $4.7 billion to start building the National Broadband Network, improving vital communications infrastructure. These various infrastructure projects were all left off the agenda by the previous Howard government. Since coming to office this government has made nation-building infrastructure a top investment priority. The budget reinforces our commitment to investing in significant infrastructure that will provide increased productivity and underpin future economic growth.

This budget also addresses two important social issues by increasing pension payments and introducing a historic paid parental leave scheme. Both are things, I think, that our government can be truly proud of. We all know that many seniors in our community do it tough. I have spoken to countless seniors in my electorate about the weekly struggles they face to get by on a pension particularly those on a single pension. This budget recognises the fact that people in the community who are getting on in age deserve support from their government as they approach their twilight years. These are the people who have seen us through some of our darkest hours and we should support them in their old age.

Under our reforms single pensioners will receive an increase of up to $32.49 a week and couples $10.14 per week combined. This means that the total assistance for single pensions will increase from $304.90 per week to $336.68 per week. For pensioner couples it will increase from $497.36 per week to $507.50 per week. All of Chisholm’s age pensioners, disability pensioners, carers and veteran income support recipients will benefit from these increases, and I have had many thank my office for this increase in payments. This will make a significant difference to the lives of some 20,000 pensioners that live in my electorate. When combined with the one-off lump sum payment provided to pensioners in December last year, the increase in payments represents the government’s unprecedented support for pensioners. When it comes to issues such as pension reforms, I am very proud to be part of a government that listens to the community, and I welcome the extra support provided to pensioners in this budget.

Self-funded retirees, again, a large group in my electorate, will also benefit from the budget. We recognise the fact that self-funded retirees have had their income severely affected by the global recession, perhaps more than any other demographic, and they have borne the brunt of the global financial crisis. Therefore, from 1 July 2009 the government will have the minimum amounts self-funded retirees have to draw down from their account based pensions halved for 2009-10. This extends the draw-down relief provided by the government for
2008-09, recognising the impact of the global recession. This change will assist pensioners’ account balances to recover from capital losses associated with the global recession. It will reduce the need for self-funded retirees to sell assets at a loss in order to meet the minimum withdrawal requirement in 2009-10.

In order to prepare Australians for future economic and social challenges, this government has taken the historic step of delivering a paid parental leave scheme. This is a scheme that will make a genuine difference to young families across Australia. I know what it is like to juggle the demands of working and having a new baby. This combination of work and family life is difficult to manage and I believe it is imperative that the government do what it can to support families handle these competing demands. Admittedly, I did not have to forgo salary when I had my children as I was still working in the parliament but, having worked on many paid parental leave schemes in enterprise bargains throughout the finance sector, I know the great benefit they have delivered to many and it is terrific that we have now done it for all.

As of 1 January 2010 the scheme will provide the primary care giver with 18 weeks post-natal leave paid at the adult federal minimum wage. It will be of particular benefit to low- and middle-income families where mums have been left out of the picture for far too long. This scheme brings us into line with other advanced nations. It is responsible and sustainable reform and has been broadly welcomed by the community, and I am proud to offer my support to such an important initiative and commend all those who struggled so long to see it happen.

This government is committed to rebuilding and modernising Australia’s education system. After years of neglect by the previous government, this budget includes $1.5 billion in recurrent funding for universities and students, with $491 million being committed over four years to uncap the number of public university places from 2012. This means that anyone who is eligible for a place of their choice can secure one. Additionally, $394 million of new funding will encourage greater participation of low-income students in higher education. These two funding measures adhere to the notion that all Australians deserve the best possible education outcome.

Within my electorate of Chisholm this is greatly welcomed. Indeed, Chisholm could be described as a very large university town. It includes Monash University, Deakin University’s Melbourne campus, the Box Hill Institute of TAFE and the Chadstone campus of GippsTAFE. Last week I was privileged to be joined by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for a tour of the Chadstone campus of GippsTAFE. I am sure that a whole lot of people were looking at the news and wondering what I was doing at the Gippsland TAFE, but the Gippsland TAFE have an amazing little facility in my electorate at Chadstone. It used to be owned by the SEC—it was where you did your linesman training. I was joined there by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister when we announced that GippsTAFE would be receiving funding of $16.2 million for redevelopment under the Education Investment Fund. This was exceptionally warmly received by GippsTAFE, who have struggled for many years to have the site recognised and to have this funding. Indeed, when we came and said that the funding was coming and that the Prime Minister was coming to visit, I do not think that I have seen happier people than all those involved at GippsTAFE.

The funding will provide new training facilities at the campus which will be used to
help train workers to build the $43 billion National Broadband Network. It will become one of a series of technical colleges across the country with specialty facilities to provide training for NBN workers. This means GippsTAFE will support some of the, on average, 25,000 jobs each year it will take to construct the National Broadband Network over the next eight years. I was speaking with some of the younger workers at GippsTAFE last week and they were genuinely thrilled that the government is providing such support to young job seekers looking to secure apprenticeships. At GippsTAFE they are training apprentices and also providing pre-apprenticeship training. In Victoria, they are also training everyone from the Northern Territory. It is a vital part of the power generation system that our great nation relies upon.

GippsTAFE’s redevelopment is one of 31 projects funded in the budget as part of the $934 million round 2 funding from the Education Investment Fund. This fund represents this government’s commitment to tertiary education. The site will be transformed. It will be transformed into part of education into the 21st century. It will not only play a key role in delivering a sustainable future through training and research but also act as a demonstration site for new and emerging technologies. It will also go on doing its great work of teaching people to be linesmen.

The budget also includes $1 billion in recurrent funds for research and innovation, which includes $512 million to support researchers across our universities. Included in this funding is $8 billion for a new biological lab at Monash University. Monash has benefited greatly in recent times from this government’s commitment to higher education research and innovation, and it is truly thankful. It was successful under round 1 of the education investment announced in December last year when it received $89.9 million to build the New Horizons Centre, which will bring together disparate science and engineering expertise in a new world-class research facility. This is a fantastic project that will see the university cement its place as one of the country’s most important educational institutions. It will develop the Clayton Innovation Precinct into the most significant technology and innovation hub in the Southern Hemisphere. The $8 million announced in the budget will support a new laboratory within the Australian Regenerative Medicine Institute and it will be established as a partner of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory. The EMBL, as it is known, is a world-leading research organisation supported by 20 European member states and five major laboratories in Germany, France, Italy and the UK. I was recently privileged to be at the opening of ARMI, where this great research is going on, and to see the groundbreaking work that is happening there.

Australia became an Associate Member of the EMBL in March 2008 and this will be the first partner laboratory to be established outside of Europe. It is a great honour indeed. As a former Monash student, I am glad to see the institution continue to thrive and for the government to support such a significant project. Monash is not just a very large institution in my electorate but also one of the largest employers. It is a great facility and we need to continue to fund it to do the great work that it does.

This budget sees $3.2 billion committed from the Health and Hospital Fund to invest in hospital and medical research infrastructure. This funding includes $1.5 billion over seven years to expand and modernise key public hospital infrastructure, $1.3 billion over six years to modernise cancer services and $430 million over six years in supporting cooperative research precincts. The Monash Health Research Precinct is in my electorate
and will be receiving $71 million over three years to build new research facilities. The precinct is in partnership with the Monash Institute of Medical Research, Prince Henry’s Institute and Southern Health. It unites the largest healthcare services provider in Victoria with two leading Australian medical research institutions. It is committed to fostering the translation of basic research knowledge into clinical practice. The new facility will train Monash students and work with the Deakin School of Medicine to provide translational and clinical research opportunities. It is a major investment that will increase the research capacity and capability of the precinct. It is a great recognition of what a terrific area we have—Monash University and Monash Medical Centre working in combination for the betterment of our country.

Embedded in the budget is important reform that signals a change in the direction of our treatment of asylum seekers. I welcome the government’s decision to abolish the arbitrary 45-day rule that resulted in some 40 per cent of the community based asylum seekers living in dire poverty. The former Howard government introduced legislation whereby all asylum seekers who had not applied for protection visas within 45 days of arrival in Australia were denied the right to work and were therefore given a bridging visa E with no work rights. These visas deny work rights and access to medical services to individuals and families, many of whom are later determined to be refugees with genuine protection needs. Under the changes announced in the budget, a fair and more flexible arrangement will be put in place which recognises that people who have complied with Australia’s immigration requirements should not be deprived of permission to work. We have put many people into the community and literally forced them to starve or rely on charity. I have campaigned long and hard with many in my electorate to see this great new measure happen and I welcome the fact that the government has seen its merits.

This decision recognises and supports the human rights of those on bridging visa E to access work rights and medical services while their visa application is processed. You might think that is a short time frame, but I know one family has been living in these dire straits for over nine years. Fewer protection visitor applicants will be reliant on friends, families or charitable organisations for support while waiting for their application to be considered. They just want the right to work. This announcement will ease the burden on local charities and community stakeholders who commit huge resources to assisting people forced into a limbo situation where they can live in Australia but are not permitted to work. I have witnessed firsthand the problems this rule has imposed upon asylum seekers in my electorate and I welcome this new stance, which stands in stark contrast to the unfair and inhumane policy advocated over so many years by the previous government. I would like to put on the record my incredible thanks to the Hotham Mission and the Asylum Seeker Project, and many other churches in my electorate, which have literally housed, fed and supported these people through many years of trying to have their asylum recognised.

This is a budget that supports jobs and delivers the important investment needed to strengthen the economy for the future. It invests in nation-building infrastructure—road, metro rail, ports, clean energy and universities. It delivers a fair go for pensioners and a sustainable pension system and introduces for the first time a paid parental leave scheme. With the worst global recession since the Great Depression wiping $210 billion from the government’s revenue, we have been forced to prioritise and make the hard
choices necessary to chart the course back to surplus. Despite some decisions not being popular, we are putting the national economic interests first to ensure Australia emerges from the global downturn in the strongest shape possible.

I am impressed by the reaction to the budget within my electorate. Many see this as doing great things and this is on top of the money we are all obviously giving to our primary schools. All of the primary schools in my electorate are exceptionally grateful for the BER money that is coming for the first time and recognising the need to build within the infrastructure within our primary school community. It comes on top of great work we have been doing within our secondary schools and it redresses many of the wrongs created by the previous government. I am impressed by the way this difficult budget has been delivered and I commend the bills to the House.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism will be absent from question time this week as he is attending the G8 meeting of energy ministers in Rome and the Fighting Climate Change with Carbon Capture and Storage conference in Norway. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry will be answering questions in his place.

QUEENSLAND AND NEW SOUTH WALES FLOODS

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—Mr Speaker, I seek to make a statement on indulgence concerning the recent flood situation in Queensland and New South Wales.

The SPEAKER—Indulgence is granted.

Mr Rudd—On behalf of all Australians our thoughts are with the people of South-East Queensland and northern New South Wales who are dealing with yet another flood disaster. I am advised that in the last 24 hours there have been 1,654 people affected by evacuations in Smithtown, Gladstone, Kincela, Jerseyville, Woodburn, Cabbage Tree Island and Bellingen. Approximately 20,000 people remain isolated in the Northern Rivers and North Coast region at Glenleigh, Thora, Bellingen, Coraki, Maclean, Yamba, Iluka, Darkwood, Kalang, Hat Head, South West Rocks, Smithtown, Gladstone, Kincela, and Jerseyville CBD. Crescent Head and Maria River became isolated overnight with around 5,100 people affected. It is possible these people may remain isolated for up to 14 days.

The evacuation order has been lifted for areas around Kempsey, Grafton, South Grafton, Ulmarra, Brushgrove and Maclean; however, the Pacific Highway remains closed blocking access for evacuated residents. Local businesses in the Kempsey CBD have reopened; however, there are still some problems with road access. The New South Wales SES has responded to 2,788 requests for assistance and is currently conducting resupply operations for isolated rural properties using flood boats and helicopters. In Queensland the severe weather warning for damaging surf for coastal parts of the southeast coast district and Fraser Island has now been cancelled and there are now no current flood warnings. However, there are coastal wind warnings for Caldwell to Burnett Heads and a number of rivers continue to be monitored.
On behalf of the parliament I send my condolences to the families of the two people who have died as a result of these extreme weather events. One man was struck during high winds on the Gold Coast last weekend and another man died in flooding at Raleigh, south of Coffs Harbour, on Saturday. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of those during this difficult time. I would also like to acknowledge the untiring efforts of all emergency services workers in these areas. Some of them have travelled significant distances to volunteer their efforts. I know that local members have been working to assist their local constituents with their needs in this difficult time. In particular I would acknowledge the work of the member for Page, who has been providing me with updates over the past week about the impact of the flooding and those living in and around her electorate in northern New South Wales. I would also refer to the contributions of other members.

The government has been in constant contact with the Queensland and New South Wales governments to ensure that any assistance required from the Commonwealth is being provided. Over the weekend the Minister for Human Services, Senator Ludwig, toured affected areas in the Ipswich region and South-East Queensland and the Attorney-General toured flooded areas in northern New South Wales. I would also refer to the contributions of other members.

Last week the government commenced making payments under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements available to people affected both in South-East Queensland and northern New South Wales. In Queensland this assistance provided, in cooperation with the Queensland government across 12 local government areas affected by the flooding, emergency assistance payments of $165 per person and up to $765 per family; essential household contents grants of $1,635 per individual and up to $4,910 per couple or family; and essential repairs to housing grants of up to $10,100 per individual and up to $13,600 per family.

In New South Wales the assistance provided, in cooperation with the New South Wales government across 12 local government areas, has included personal hardship and distress grants to low-income earners whose principal place of residence has been damaged; concessional loans of up to $130,000 for eligible small businesses and primary producers affected by the disaster; concessional loans of up to $25,000 to voluntary non-profit organisations for the restoration of essential facilities; and road and rail freight subsidies of up to $15,000 to assist primary producers for the carriage of livestock and fodder.

Today the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs also activated the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment to provide further assistance to help those in northern New South Wales affected by the flood disaster. The Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment will be a one-off immediate payment of $1,000 to adults and $400 to children. Claims for assistance can be made through Centrelink.

Today, in recognition of the severe damage to local communities in northern New South Wales, the government has agreed to a request from the New South Wales Premier to extend the current assistance being provided to small business and to primary producers in the flood affected areas in northern New South Wales. This assistance will include one-off grants of up to $15,000 for small businesses and primary producers that can provide proof of expenditure on flood related recovery. The New South Wales Rural Assistance Authority will administer these payments. I have also today authorised this
assistance for people affected by the earlier floods in New South Wales in late March.

In announcing these payments the government recognises that this is the third season that many farmers have gone through without any substantial income as a result of extreme weather conditions. Damage to the agricultural sector has impacts on many other interdependent aspects of the community and the local members will be liaising with their communities to advise of any other additional assistance which is required. Mr Speaker, it is important to remember that this is not the first time these areas have faced severe weather months. In true Australian spirit these communities, who have already suffered and picked themselves up, are facing with tenacity and courage yet another battle today and the government stands ready to assist. As I have said on many occasions in the past, the Commonwealth stands ready to provide whatever assistance is necessary to those affected and I know all members of this place and all Australians around the country are standing by them in this time of need.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Leader of the Opposition) (2.06 pm)—On indulgence: I rise today in support of the Prime Minister’s remarks regarding the floods in South-East Queensland and the floods in northern New South Wales. It is worth contemplating and reflecting on the unpredictability of our weather in Australia, and I note that, until relatively recently, South-East Queensland was going through an unprecedented drought, with dams getting very close to empty. Just last week, as my colleagues the members for Moncrieff, McPherson and Fadden will attest, their communities received one year’s worth of rain in just three days. All of us saw the frightening pictures on the news of debris being hurled around in gale force winds which tragically resulted in the death of one man, and, of course, there was another life lost tragically as well. I join with the Prime Minister in giving our condolences to the families and friends of those two people who were killed.

There have been very many anxious moments over the weekend. The Prime Minister mentioned the efforts of his colleague the member for Page, and the New South Wales seat of our colleague the member for Cowper, adjoining Page, was also affected mightily. Hundreds of residents in Grafton, Maclean and Kempsey were evacuated from their homes. The levee banks in these communities were tested to their absolute limit. We should in this House pay tribute today to the incredible dedication, diligence and bravery of our emergency services personnel. Many of these men and women will be at, or near, the point of exhaustion in their struggle to deal with this challenge of getting vital supplies and emergency assistance to the affected areas. Almost all of them are volunteers and we extend the gratitude of this parliament and the nation to them for their tireless efforts.

The Australian spirit of mateship, generosity and self-sacrifice always shines through at times like this on so many occasions during these floods. I note especially, for example, the way in which the residents of the coastal community of Coffs Harbour helped out their neighbours from the Clarence with food and a warm bed. Australians are strong and resilient people. We have an often capricious and certainly unpredictable climate. In times like this, as we have in the past, we must always stand ready to support and encourage our fellow Australians as they face these tough times.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Economy

Mr TURNBULL (2.09 pm)—Will the Prime Minister at last level with the Australian people and tell this House the maximum
amount of government debt his budget will create, expressed as a sum of money?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question. On the question of gross debt, as I indicated in many interviews last week, gross debt peaks at around $300 billion; secondly, net debt peaks at around $200 billion; and, thirdly, I have said repeatedly that net debt rises to about 13.8 per cent of GDP, which to the chagrin of those opposite is the lowest net debt of all the major advanced economies. In fact this is about one-seventh that of the other major advanced economies. What I find remarkable in the debate which the Leader of the Opposition has engaged in on this matter over the last week and beyond is that it does reflect a general strategy on the part of those opposite which is this: they will stop at nothing to talk the economy down. This government have embraced a nation-building strategy for recovery; those opposite are engaged in talking the economy down. The government are in the business of building the economy up; those opposite are in the business of talking the economy down. The reason why we have a positive strategy and they have a negative strategy is that we are acting in the national interest and they are acting in their political interest. The contrast is absolutely clear.

So I would suggest to those opposite that, when they are confronted with developments out there in the economy which actually suggest that Australia is doing better than other economies in the midst of the worst recession in three-quarters of a century, it would be useful if they began talking positively about the economy as well, rather than engaging in one permanent negative diatribe about what is going on out there. The net impact of talking the economy down is to in fact have an effect on confidence and, if you have that effect on confidence, that has an effect on real economic performance. So the contrast is clear for all to see. We stand for a positive strategy, and those opposite are for a negative strategy. We stand for talking the economy up; you stand for talking the economy down. The contrast is clear for all to see.

Economy

Ms REA (2.12 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline how the government is supporting jobs today by investing in the nation-building infrastructure of tomorrow to lift Australia out of recession as rapidly as possible?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for Bonner for her question because it goes to building the economy up in the part of Brisbane that she represents. The government is seeking to build the economy up in the electorates of all members in this place, even though a large slice of them chose to vote against these measures. Let us take the electorate of Bonner, which the honourable member represents. The government’s Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan is currently supporting 103 projects in the electorate of Bonner—a $29.9 million investment in the honourable member’s electorate. This includes 101 projects under the Building the Education Revolution program, the single largest school modernisation program in Australia’s history. It also includes black spot projects right across the country—in the case of the electorate of Bonner and Brisbane, a $1.25 million investment.

These practical projects are the way in which we are building the economy up, while those opposite are embarked upon a strategy to talk the economy down. Right across the country, the government’s nation building for recovery plan is about to launch 35,000 projects by year’s end. Already in the case of rail and road, $135 million has been spent on the Hunter Valley to Newcastle rail track to transport coal—150 jobs in the
Hunter region. Already, work has begun on the line between Maroona and the South Australian border and the line between Albury and Seymour in Victoria, two rail projects worth 240 jobs. The first of 301,000 new concrete railway sleepers have been unloaded near Parkes for the Cootamundra to Parkes track upgrade. Work continues on the $164 million Midland Highway Brighton bypass project in Tasmania. The bypass and associated transport hub are expected to provide up to 380 jobs in Tasmania. That is simply in rail and road.

In social housing, construction of the first new house built under the stimulus plan has now been completed. The house was built in 13 weeks with a total of 52 people involved in the building works, which also included three apprentices. Work has also commenced on site for 29 new housing construction projects in Tasmania, 45 construction projects in New South Wales and 42 new ones in Western Australia.

In the National School Pride Program, where every school in the country is being allocated between $50,000 and $200,000 for maintenance and repairs, projects are beginning right across the nation. The Primary Schools for the 21st Century program has already commenced early work on more than 300 schools around Australia as part of round 1 of what will be the largest school modernisation program in Australia’s history. Community infrastructure is being built, with 137 councils being funded to build and renew community infrastructure right across the country, including sporting infrastructure. In energy efficiency, 20,000 Australian homeowners have had ceiling insulation installed in their homes and more than 20,000 homeowners have installed a solar hot water system under the stimulus plan’s energy efficiency program. These are the practical projects that are underway at present. This is practical work to build the economy up, not to tear the economy down.

If you were wandering around the country last week and listening to what the Leader of the Opposition and the member for North Sydney were saying, you would have heard one diatribe of negativity. Every single interview was aimed at talking the economy down, talking confidence down and therefore talking the performance of our economy down. Our nation building for recovery plan is about building the economy up. We are supporting jobs, small business and apprenticeships today by investing in the infrastructure Australia needs for tomorrow. That is why we as the government have stepped in to fill the gap which has been left by the private sector in retreat. That is why we have invested nearly 70 per cent of the government’s stimulus strategy in nation-building infrastructure. That is the strategy that we have embarked upon. Those opposite, however, are embarked upon a negative scare campaign on deficit and debt with a view to talking the economy down. We have a nation building for recovery plan. The government is proud of it. We are getting on with the business of making an impact on the global economic recession, a recession which is causing havoc across every economy in the world, and that is why Australia is doing better than most other economies in the world.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.18 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a parliamentary delegation from the People’s Republic of China. The delegation is led by Madam Chen Zhili, Vice-Chair of the National Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome to our visitors.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Mr HOCKEY (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Does the Treasurer stand by his statement of 20 May this year that the peak debt will be $315 billion?

Mr SWAN—I will start off by saying that the government absolutely welcomes this debate about deficit and debt—we certainly do. By the end of the forward estimates, net debt will be $188 billion or 13.6 per cent of GDP. By 2013-14, net debt will be $203 billion or 13.8 per cent of GDP. If he wants me to go on and talk about gross debt, I am happy to do that as well. In 2013-14 it will be $315 billion.

These are matters that were raised by me in numerous interviews last week. Why were they raised and why are they relevant to questions in the House today? They are relevant because this country has had imposed on it a collapse of revenues by $210 billion over the forward estimates. That is why it is necessary for the government to borrow to support jobs, to support business and to support our economy at a time of national need because of the global recession.

Those opposite continue to wander around Australia with the pretence that if they were in government they would not be borrowing right now. We all know that that is a falsehood; it is absurd. But those opposite will simply not fess up and admit that if they were in government now they would be borrowing every single dollar that we have had to borrow and they would not pay it off one day earlier than this government. But they want to, for their own political reasons, continue this farce that somehow if they were in government at the moment they would not have to borrow. The responsible thing to do for the Australian people to support employment and to support business is to borrow and then chart the course back to surplus, which is exactly what this government’s budget does.

We had a couple of outings from those opposite over the past week. First of all, at the end of last week we had the address-in-reply from the Leader of the Opposition. Then we had the shadow Treasurer wandering off to the Press Club for his traditional reply. There were three words that were not spoken in either of those speeches, and those three words were ‘alternative fiscal policy’. There was no alternative fiscal policy put by the opposition in either of those two outings. Given the magnitude of the economic challenge faced by this country, this should not have been a normal reply from the opposition. Given their critique of the government, they had an obligation to put before the Australian people an alternative, and they did not. Fronting up to a budget reply in the middle of a global recession, whether it is the Leader of the Opposition or whether it is the shadow Treasurer, without an alternative fiscal policy is a bit like the jockey turning up to the Melbourne Cup without a horse.

They stand absolutely naked in this debate. They pretend they have an alternative fiscal policy, but at the end of the day they will borrow every dollar this government has been forced to borrow and they will not pay it off one day earlier, given their lack of commitment and given their lack of guts. The one thing we do know is that they have not got the guts to chart the course back to surplus, like this government does, which is why we took the hard decisions in the budget to bring the budget back to surplus and to look after the long-term interests of this country.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the Treasurer was asked a brief question which required a brief answer. It has been going on for over five minutes. I would ask you to draw him to a close.
The Speaker—The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

Infrastructure

Mr Ripoll (2.24 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. How is the government supporting local economies by investing in the nation’s road infrastructure and how does this compare to previous investments?

Mr Albanese—I thank the member for Oxley for his question. Indeed, I note that through the government’s Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan there are some 135 smaller infrastructure projects taking place in his electorate, costing some $54.4 million. Each of these projects is supporting local jobs, stimulating the local economy and leaving the electorate of Oxley and the greater Ipswich area an even better placed to live. This includes some 109 projects under the Building the Education Revolution plan, the biggest school modernisation plan in the nation’s history. It includes two black spots projects at a cost of $1.4 million. It is worth noting with regard to these projects in Oxley that many of these projects are underway right now. If those opposite had their way, none of these projects would be proceeding—none of them.

There is one big project underway as well that will affect the electorate of Oxley—as well as, of course, the electorate of Blair, the electorate of Moreton and other electorates in Brisbane—and that is the Ipswich Motorway. For the Ipswich Motorway upgrade, which was opposed by those opposite, $2.5 billion was provided by this side of parliament in order to ease urban traffic congestion in the western suburbs of Brisbane. The Prime Minister and I—with you, Member for Oxley, and the member for Blair and others—turned the first sod on 2 March 2008, just 14 months ago. We returned to where the works are taking place on the Friday after last sitting period, and there the people managing the site told us that 4,000 Australians had been inducted into the work on that site alone. That is 4,000 put to work building the nation, building the economic recovery. This project, of course, is all part of the N1, building a modern highway network from Melbourne all the way to Cairns, both through the main highways and through the feeder networks. There is also $2.6 billion into the Bruce Highway, double what the previous government contributed over 12 years, and for the Pacific Highway, $3.1 billion from this side of the House in six years against $1.3 billion from those opposite over 12 long years—and it runs through most of their electorates.

Today I, along with the member for Riverina, attended the latest milestone in the duplication of the Hume: the opening of the new $78 million Sheahan Bridge duplication over the Murrumbidgee at Gundagai. That was two months ahead of schedule and on budget. In the December stimulus package we brought forward $490 million to accelerate work on the Tarcutta and Woomargama bypasses, bringing forward that work to create jobs now to make the Australian economy more productive. All of these plans were opposed by those opposite. We do need nation building for recovery. The government understands that and that is why we are getting on with the job of delivering it.

Economy

Mr Turnbull (2.28 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. This afternoon the Prime Minister has said that gross debt will peak at $300 billion and a few minutes later the Treasurer has said that it will peak at $315 billion. If the Prime Minister and the Treasurer cannot agree on these figures in the budget, what confidence can
the Australian people have that they are able to manage our trillion dollar economy?

Mr RUDD—As the honourable member will know, there is nothing inconsistent with what the Treasurer has said and what I have said before—none whatsoever. On the question of debt, though, I really enjoy the questions on the part of those opposite, because one of the matters which is relevant on debt is, of course, foreign debt, and foreign debt is something which those opposite seem to be very reluctant to discuss in this place. If we look carefully at what was—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order regarding relevance. The Prime Minister was asked a question about government debt and inconsistencies between himself and the Treasurer, not a question about foreign debt.

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will resume his seat. I will listen carefully to the rest of the response from the Prime Minister and remind him of the need to be relevant to the question.

Mr RUDD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. And of course, on the question of net debt, presumably the basis of the question being asked by those opposite is their concern about the overall assessment by international credit-rating agencies. I draw to the attention of those opposite, in their desperate attempt to talk the Australian economy down, that Standard and Poor’s, the international rating agency, said just after the budget was released a week or so ago that Australia’s AAA rating was reaffirmed. Those opposite then disappeared at a thousand miles an hour, realising that their core political attack in fact had no basis in substance whatsoever, because they knew that they were engaged in a negative scare campaign—a fear campaign with one objective, which was to talk the Australian economy down.

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order that goes to relevance. The question relates to a discrepancy of $15 billion between what the Treasurer has said and what the Prime Minister has said. That is all he has to speak to.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The question is related to gross debt. The Prime Minister, as I have said, knows of the requirement to make his response relevant to the question.

Mr RUDD—Thank you, Mr Speaker. Therefore, on the question of net debt, the statement made before by the Treasurer and our public commentary on this has been consistent, and that is that net debt would peak out at around 200 and gross debt would peak out at about 300. That is what we have said consistently. For those opposite who are interested in it, they should find it so in the budget papers.

Nation Building and Jobs Plan

Ms CAMPBELL (2.32 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline for the House the role of nation-building infrastructure in the government’s comprehensive plan to stimulate the economy?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Bass for her question. As the member knows, our Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan will deliver something like 80 projects in her electorate worth something like $34 million. Of this, there will be 63 school projects which are part of the biggest school modernisation program in our history. There will be 10 housing units. There will be seven black spot projects. There will be $8.9 million for community infrastructure. Of course, as the Prime Minister indicated before, if those opposite had their way not one of these 80 projects would be happening right now—not one happening to support local employment, not one happening to support local
business, not one happening to support a local economy in the face of this global recession.

Last week both the Prime Minister and I had the opportunity to move extensively around the country. I went to Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Darwin to talk to locals about what was going on in their communities and about what important infrastructure investments we were undertaking right across the nation. In Adelaide I spoke to Mr Ron Jenkins, who is the president of the Seaford District Residents Association in South Australia. As the member for Kingston knows, he had been calling for an extension of the Noarlunga to Seaford rail in South Australia for something like four years. Ron, I have to say, was pretty pleased with the government’s commitment to $291 million to deliver critical public transport to a rapidly growing area. On the Sunshine Coast both the Prime Minister and I had the opportunity to talk to Mr Wayne Sachs, who is an ambulance officer in Gympie. Of course, he was pretty pleased with the government’s decision of $488 million to duplicate the Cooroy to Curra section of the Bruce Highway. He said to us that this would save very many lives. In Darwin, with the member for Solomon, I met with Mr Gary Fry, who is the principal of the Moulden Park Primary School in Darwin. He was pretty pleased with the funding that was coming through the National School Pride and Value in Action school projects, which were going to enhance the performance of his students.

I think it is important that these local projects bring local communities together, because bringing communities together and bringing all Australians together is very important given the environment of this global recession. We are dealing with an event the likes of which we have not seen in 75 years, and it is critical that as the national government we take steps to stimulate local economies and, through those local economies, the national economy. Otherwise, the burden would fall fairly and squarely on families and small business. So our stimulus strategy has basically had three phases. The first phase was to move very quickly when this became apparent at the end of last year, and that was to direct cash to cash constrained people in the country. It was very important to get that out to those people last December to keep up retail sales over Christmas. It was very important to keep employment up over Christmas. It was very important to keep employment up over Christmas. It was very important to support small businesses during that time. That was very important in maintaining confidence in the Australian economy.

Phase 2 is coming through now: 35,000 construction projects around the country, the likes of which members around here are out there supporting day in, day out. Of course, it is the case that there are some on that side of the House who are out there supporting them as well. They are champions for stimulus in their local communities, but they are pussy-cats when they come to this parliament. They are out there supporting these projects in the local community and voting against them in this House. I was at an event on the weekend where a state Liberal member of parliament gave the stimulus package his full support. He was not game to say anything else given there were 250 parents there at that school.

But we are doing this for the best of reasons. It is not just about the education revolution, it is about supporting jobs, it is about supporting business and it is about supporting the Australian economy at a time of great need. That is why our three phases of economic stimulus have been very important.

If we are meant to believe what those opposite say—that they do not really believe in borrowing—what is the logical consequence of that position? Because there has been a $210 billion collapse in revenues, to make up
for that they would have to savagely increase taxes or savagely cut services. So which is it? Because if they are not going to do that they will borrow every cent that we are borrowing and they will not pay it back one day earlier.

**Budget**

Mr TURNBULL (2.37 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I ask the Prime Minister in what year will the government debt he is creating reach its maximum and how long will it take to pay it off?

Mr RUDD—As the honourable member will be aware, the gross debt figure which he referred to before peaks in 2013-14. As the honourable member would be aware, when we reach the end of the period 2019-20 you will see the net debt figure reduce to 3.7 per cent of GDP.

**Education Funding**

Ms COLLINS (2.38 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Will the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on what the government is doing to invest in education infrastructure and on the reaction from the community to this investment?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Franklin for her question. I also thank her for the opportunity I had recently to visit Blackmans Bay Primary School in her electorate, where I announced the successful Tasmanian primary schools for the first round of Primary Schools for the 21st Century under the Building the Education Revolution program. I know that the member for Franklin, as a member who is in touch with her local community, is delighted that 50 schools in her electorate have already been allocated $31.9 million for 62 projects as part of Building the Education Revolution.

These benefits for local schools and for local jobs in the electorate of Franklin are examples of what is happening right around the country. As members on this side of the House are clearly aware, the biggest school modernisation program in this nation’s history is the single biggest part of the government’s $42 billion economic stimulus strategy, our Nation Building and Jobs Plan. It is a plan that is all about supporting jobs today while we build the infrastructure we need for tomorrow in almost 10,000 schools right around the country.

Already the government has announced rounds 1 and 2 of the National School Pride Program, totalling $1.3 billion, which has already been allocated to 9,490 eligible primary and secondary schools around the country for 13,176 projects. And many of these projects have already started, meaning that schools around the country are a hive of activity, supporting local jobs and supporting local tradies.

In addition, I have announced the first 1,499 primary schools that will receive up to $3 million each through round 1 of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program. This will total 2,010 projects approved at a value of $2.83 billion.

So with just these two programs to date the Rudd government is supporting 15,186 projects and injecting $4.13 billion of construction activity into our economy. This has been well received by those who care about education. I take you to a letter I received from Maria Hardy, the Principal of Bondi Beach Public School.

**Opposition members interjecting—**

Ms GILLARD—Yes, where is Bondi Beach Public School, I wonder? She wrote to me on 8 May and said:

I write on behalf of all staff, students, parents and carers of Bondi Beach Public School to thank you for the funding received under the National
School Pride program. The submission process involved wide community consultation and we are very happy that our efforts have been rewarded.

Unfortunately, the Principal of the Bondi Beach Public School was not able to write on behalf of her local federal member, the Leader of the Opposition, who opposed every dollar of investment in that school.

But what is and has been amazing about recent days regarding the Building the Education Revolution program is the orgy of opportunism coming from those opposite, who, urged on by the member for Higgins, come to Canberra and rush into the parliament to vote against Building the Education Revolution and then, in their local electorates, cannot wait to be associated with it. I am glad that the member for Franklin asked me this question because I think she would be a bit amazed to know that Senator Abetz—some mothers do have them—appears to be trying to take credit for a program that he opposes. Senator Abetz sent an email to my office seeking a list, in Excel format, of the names of the principals and the addresses of the schools that have been successful so that he could send letters of congratulations to them. He votes against it in the Senate and then wants me to give him the list of names and addresses so that he can send letters of congratulations!

If only it was just Senator Abetz. But, of course, the member for Menzies got himself into the act by writing to me and expressing his disappointment that he only got the list of the successful schools in his electorate under the National School Pride Program a day before they were in his local newspapers. The question for the member for Menzies is: is he such an honest man that he is disappointed he did not get a press release out to his local newspapers in time to say that he opposed every dollar of that expenditure, or is he disappointed that he did not get an opportunity to fully associate himself with a program that he opposes? While the orgy of opportunism continues amongst those opposite—out in their electorates pretending they support the stimulus, here sitting behind the Leader of the Opposition voting against the biggest school modernisation program the nation has ever seen—we will be getting on with building those schools, supporting jobs today and the infrastructure we need for tomorrow.

Economy

Mr Turnbull (2.45 pm)—Mr Speaker, my question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer to his previous answer in which he said ‘net debt is projected to be 3.8 per cent of GDP in 2020’. Could the Prime Minister tell the House what he projects GDP to be in 2020 and what he projects the net debt to be in 2020 expressed as a sum of money?

Mr Rudd—On the question of GDP and 2020, I do not have that number with me. On the question of net debt as a figure, it would be about 75 billion. I also draw the honourable member’s attention to the following: these figures represent, on Australia’s part, a net debt performance that is the lowest of all the major advanced economies. I would say to the honourable member opposite that when net debt peaks for Australia at 13.8 per cent of GDP, the average for the major advanced economies is 88.7 per cent of GDP: for Japan, 131 per cent of GDP; for the United Kingdom, 80; for the United States, 80; Canada, 28; France, 79; Germany, 84; Italy, 125. Then we go to the rest of the economies.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. What about Zimbabwe? What is the point of this nonsense? He was asked a specific—
The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—Thank you, Mr Speaker. We know that the member for Dickson has such a strong and personal relationship with the Leader of the Opposition. That is why he seems to figure so prominently in question time. Mind you, given his performance last week on private health insurance and public hospitals, it is no wonder why.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The Prime Minister is making a mockery of question time. He refuses to answer the—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Manager of the Opposition Business will resume his seat.

Mr Bevis—Many have made the same comment about Dutton!

The SPEAKER—The member for Brisbane is not assisting. The member for Sturt knows that when he rises for a point of order, he can make his point of order, he cannot then add matter. I am not going to enter into things such as we had in the last sitting week, when that matter that is added, if it is not in Hansard, is put into Hansard, because then that indicates that the purpose of the point of order was not a point of order but trying to get things on record by way of debate. On the question of relevance, the Prime Minister is responding to the question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. The uncomfortable news for those opposite is that net deficit and net debt for this country compare well against the rest of the world. On the question of net debt, I would simply re-emphasise this point: when our net debt peaks at 13.8 per cent of GDP, as projected in the budget papers, it represents not just the lowest of the other major advanced economies, it is something like seven times lower. That means that when we peak at 13.8, that across the G7 will be 88.7. I heard an interjection before in relation to the other advanced economies. The average across the other advanced economies is, I am advised, 79.1. Therefore, for Australia, taking such a responsible approach to stepping in to make a difference with Australian economic performance now in the midst of a global recession is the responsible course of action.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, my point of order is about relevance—the relevance of this parliament. People are not getting the answers they should get.

The SPEAKER—The member for O’Connor will resume his seat. If the member for O’Connor has concerns on that front, I encourage him to enter into dialogue with the Procedure Committee. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—I welcome the interjection by the member for O’Connor. I was in Western Australia last week and I was with the WA Premier, who was supporting this government’s investment in nation building, supporting this government’s investment in the Oakajee port development, supporting this government’s investment in the Northbridge link in the middle of the city of Perth, supporting this government’s investment in a range of infrastructure projects. It seems that at that stage the government was engaged in the business of building the economy up. The only contribution the Leader of the Opposition seemed to be making in Perth last week was a dubious contribution to retail sales in a particular supermarket outlet, where he was not entertained for an extraordinarily long period of time.

On the question of net debt, the government’s position is that 13.8 per cent of GDP is the lowest of the other major advanced economies by a country mile. This entire strategy on the part of those opposite rests on
an absolute lie and the Leader of the Opposition knows that fact. That is what this is about. He knows that taxation revenues have collapsed $210 billion at a time when—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I am sure you know why I have risen. The Prime Minister should not use the word ‘lie’ to describe anything that the Leader of the Opposition has said and I ask you, for the benefit of the House, to ask him to withdraw.

The SPEAKER—My difficulty is that I am not sure that he was directing it to any person; it was that the debate or the discussion around the matter had that as its substance. It appears that the Leader of the Opposition has inferred that what the Prime Minister was saying was directed to him. I would therefore, for the convenience of the House, ask that the Prime Minister withdraw it.

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, to assist the House, I do so. The absolute untruth upon which the opposition’s strategy is based is this: they know that there has been a $210 billion collapse in taxation revenue. I contrast that with the $334 billion taxation windfall which the member for Higgins received when he was Treasurer, courtesy of the resources boom. That is fact 1. Fact 2 is that, as the member for North Sydney blurted out last week or the week before, their overall borrowings would be $25 billion less than the government’s. If you net that—

Mr Hockey—At least.

Mr Rudd—He intervenes and interjects now: ‘At least.’ The Leader of the Opposition is so well served by the member for North Sydney. They have committed themselves therefore to a gross debt of $300 billion or thereabouts, minus $25 billion. That is their position. That is the second lie upon which the entire strategy on the part of those opposite—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr Rudd—the second untruth upon which this entire strategy has been constructed.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker—

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, I will withdraw to assist you.

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has withdrawn.

Mr Rudd—It seems that those who are, shall we say, casual in their relationship with the truth are very sensitive when it comes to being pinged for being so casual in that relationship with the truth.

Of course, then we have the third element of their strategy. Firstly, they know there has been a $210 billion revenue collapse; secondly, they themselves admit through that great voice of reason on their part, the member for North Sydney, that their total debt would be $25 billion less than the government’s; thirdly, as the Deputy Prime Minister and the minister for infrastructure have said today, they then show up out on the ground and participate in the launching of infrastructure projects across the country because they want to be part of the local action. This I think also goes to the heart of the truthfulness of the strategy being embraced by those opposite.

But here it is in a nutshell: they have embarked upon a strategy to talk the economy down. That is their strategy—to talk the Australian economy down and to create a greater problem than would otherwise be the case.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Over nine minutes ago the Prime Minister was asked a specific question about $315 billion—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will resume his seat.
Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt has lost the call and will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Rudd—The government’s strategy is one of nation building for recovery, and we are in the business of doing that with our sleeves rolled up right across the country. We were in Western Australia last week with a Liberal Premier doing exactly that. In fact, I seem to recall the member for Curtin showed up at one project associated with that. Maybe I am mistaken as to where the money came from for that particular project.

Can I say to those opposite that this is the practical response to and what you do in the face of a global recession which is the worst economic downturn in three-quarters of a century. The alternatives are these: you stand back and do nothing, or you embrace the government’s strategy, which is this. When there is a huge assault on private sector activity in the economy, the government steps in temporarily to make a difference. That is what we have done. That is why we are investing in infrastructure. That is why more than 70 per cent of the government’s stimulus package is investing in infrastructure. That is why we are engaged in rail, road and ports right across the country. That is why we are investing in social housing right across the country—to make a difference, to reduce the impact. What those opposite in their hard hats say is, ‘Let the free market rip.’

Opposition members—Hard of hats!

An opposition member—You’ve got hard-hats on the brain!

Mr Rudd—Heart of hearts. I think those opposite are also challenged in terms of their hearing. What those opposite say in their heart of hearts, to the extent that they have one, is as follows. The ultimate position of those opposite seems to be: ‘Let the free market rip. Don’t intervene, and therefore throw another 200,000 people onto the unemployment queues.’ That is the position which you have, unless we accept what the member for North Sydney said last week at absolute face value. Joe, I have known you for a long time; I can only take it for what it is. You would simply borrow $25 billion less. This entire strategy is based on an absolute falsehood. You know it. But its sinister political objective is this: to talk the economy down.

The SPEAKER—I remind the Prime Minister that he should refer his remarks through the chair.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.57 pm)—Forty-six years ago today, on 25 May 1963 in Addis Ababa, the Organisation of African Unity was formed. Therefore, it is a pleasure to inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation from the United Republic of Tanzania, the Hon. Bernard K Membe. On behalf of the House, I extend to him a very warm welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Infrastructure

Mr Gibbons (2.58 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. What is the role of local capital works in cushioning the impact of the global economic recession, and how has the community responded to the government’s local capital works initiatives?

Mr Albanese—I thank the member for Bendigo for his question. Indeed, it was a pleasure to visit Kyneton with the member for Bendigo to announce the $5 million for the sports facility in Kyneton—a campaign
that had been conducted for 10 years by that local community. It is a project that will support local jobs, stimulate the local economy and make a big difference to young people in Kyneton in particular and for generations to come. We know that local capital works are a very effective way of stimulating the economy when it is needed most. That is why we have delivered $800 million through the regional and local Community Infrastructure Program.

More than 3,300 projects have been approved in local communities right across Australia, regardless of the electorate. An analysis of that $800 million shows that 53 per cent is going to government-held seats, Labor-held seats—that is slightly less than the percentage of seats we hold in the parliament, which is 55 per cent—and 41 per cent is going to Liberal and National party seats such as Sturt. Every seat in the parliament will benefit. Indeed, six per cent of that funding is going to Independent-held seats. There is a particular bias towards electorates affected by bushfire or flood. Hence the electorates of McEwen and, in particular, Kennedy have benefited substantially from this program. This contrasts with the previous government’s approach, whereby one-third of the funds under the Regional Partnerships program went into just 10 seats—and every single one of them was held by the Liberal Party or the National Party.

Our program is a part of the 70 per cent of the stimulus package that is going into infrastructure. But we know that, in spite of the fact that this is a program that is being fairly delivered across the country, those opposite voted against funding for their own electorates. Here is a photo of the member for Swan, on 1 May, pointing at plans for a new civic centre and library in South Perth, to which we are contributing $2 million. I do not think he is saying to the mayor and the local community leaders, ‘This is a project I voted against.’

The SPEAKER—I caution the minister on the overuse of props.

Mr ALBANESE—The opposition are embarrassed by this because what they are doing in their electorates is different from what they are doing in here. It is important that the people who are listening to this know exactly what they are doing in their electorates. Here is a photo of the member for Grey at the announcement of the funding for the Port Pirie library and internet centre on 1 May. The member for Mayo is pushing his way into the photograph. He did not want to miss out on being in the local paper. He was happy to welcome the $2.3 million for the new swimming pool in Strathalbyn. He was very happy to see that. Here is a photo of the member for Gilmore giving the thumbs up to the program with Senator Mark Arbib. They will not put their hands up in here, but they put their thumbs up in their electorates and pretend that they support these programs. The Dunn and Lewis youth complex in Ulladulla is a good project. The opposition were happy to vote against it in the parliament, but they go back to their electorates and pretend that they are for it. They stand up here in question time and say, ‘What about the debt and all of this?’ You cannot say that you are against the spending here and then go back to your electorate and campaign for it. It is just not fair dinkum.

From time to time we see people who are not fair dinkum but are prepared to parade themselves before the media. Indeed, last week Claire Werbeloff shot to international fame after going to extraordinary lengths to
get herself in front of the camera to give a grab and to get that few minutes of fame. But, unfortunately, when you look for the substance it just is not there. That is just like the Leader of the Opposition, who voted against the Community Infrastructure Program. One of the first projects launched was a terrific project to fix up the Waverley pavilion. I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition and suggested that he might like to come along. You would think that, out a sense of doing the right thing, he would be too embarrassed to come along.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: after six minutes of this answer, the minister is straying from relevance to the question.

The SPEAKER—The question was in order, and the answer is relevant to the question.

Mr ALBANESE—But there was no element of embarrassment from the Leader of the Opposition. He was there faster than you can say, ‘chk-chk boom!’ He was there for the grab, for that few minutes of fame. And when he was there, this is what he said...

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE—Have a look behind you, Malcolm. Your colleagues have been saying for two weeks, ‘I don’t know why Malcolm turned up.’

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will refer his remarks through the chair.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I ask you to bring them back to the question that was asked six minutes ago. They are a bunch of gasbags.

The SPEAKER—The minister has been relevant to the question, but he must refer his remarks through the chair and refer to members by their appropriate titles.

Mr ALBANESE—I am talking about the Community Infrastructure Program, like other programs where they vote one way but say something else in their electorates. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition had this to say about the program that he voted against:

I’m here to say … good work Albo, good on you for putting the money into the Pavilion for the cricket club, we welcome it …

Well, it would be nice if you voted for it—very simple. They welcome it in the electorate but vote against it in Canberra: opportunism writ large.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I note the member for Mackellar is on her feet. Has the minister concluded? The minister has concluded.

Mr Melham—What, do you want him to table the photos?

The SPEAKER—I would have thought that the member for Banks would set a better example and temper his enthusiasm.

Economy

Mr HOCKEY (3.08 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the Prime Minister’s answer a little earlier where he said peak debt would be $300 billion. The Treasurer said peak debt will be $315 billion. Treasurer, exactly where in the budget papers does it refer to $315 billion; and what will be the interest repayments on $315 billion of debt?

Mr SWAN—This sort of pick-a-box stuff is so typical and shows just how opportunistic those opposite are. The member for North Sydney knows very well the figure I referred to was beyond the forward estimates. He knows it very well. It is there for everybody to see.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr SWAN—It is there and he knows it. All this is is one giant camouflage for the
fact that they have got no alternative fiscal policy, no alternative fiscal policy whatsoever, and no answers—no economic answers for this country when it faces its biggest economic challenge in 75 years.

Mr Hockey—Where’s the figure? Where’s the figure?

The SPEAKER—Order, the member for North Sydney!

Mr Swan—And they are showing just how barren, how sterile, how devoid of ideas they are. This government have moved decisively. We have had three stages of fiscal stimulus which have been absolutely essential, given the growth contraction that has been imposed on us by the rest of the world. And we have acted on the best of advice. Could I just quote someone who is not known to be a rabid socialist; let us have a look at just what Mr Ben Bernanke has had to say about the type of action that this government have taken—why we are borrowing to support employment and to support businesses. This is what Ben Bernanke had to say in the US on 3 March:

We are better off moving aggressively today to solve our economic problems; the alternative could be a prolonged episode of economic stagnation that would not only contribute to further deterioration in the fiscal situation, but would also imply lower output, employment, and incomes for an extended period.

What we have done is everything within our power to support the employment of Australians and to support Australian businesses at this time of national economic threat. All we get from those opposite is this opportunistic approach because they are so devoid of any alternative ideas, so devoid of an alternative fiscal policy. They are so embarrassed by the fact that they have no alternative that we get this silly game-playing in this House and the pretence that they would not have to borrow to support this economy, given what has been imposed on this country by the rest of the world.

We on this side of the House are proud of what we have done with our economic stimulus. Seventy per cent of it has been put into shovel-ready projects and infrastructure, supporting employment from one end of the country to the other. What are the opposition doing? They are going out into their electorates and supporting the projects then coming in here and opposing them. Surely that says everything about their lack of courage. It says everything about their lack of commitment. They do not have the courage of their convictions because all they are concerned about is opportunistic politics. They do not have the national interest in front of them; they have the self-interest of the Leader of the Opposition, who the minister for infrastructure has just proven is a monumental hypocrite and opportunist—and the rest of them stand condemned by their actions out there in the electorate, supporting these vital projects and jobs then coming into this House and opposing them.

Infrastructure

Mr Clare (3.12 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women. Can the minister inform the House of the government’s progress in supporting jobs by building 20,000 new social housing dwellings?

Ms Plibersek—I thank the member for Blaxland for his question. At last count there were over 140 separate projects underway in his electorate—tens of millions of dollars being spent in his local schools; on local black spots; with councils on priority community infrastructure projects, on small infrastructure and large infrastructure; and 60 units of social housing in the member’s electorate, at a cost of $16.8 million. It is worth remembering two very important things: not one of these projects would have proceeded
if the opposition had their way and not one of the jobs that these projects deliver would have proceeded if the opposition had their way. In fact, these projects, which are already underway, are supporting jobs today by building the infrastructure that we will need tomorrow.

The government took early and decisive action through the economic stimulus packages, including by setting aside $6.4 billion for social housing, $400 million on repairs and maintenance, underway right across the country—and I have visited many of these marvellous projects, employing local tradespeople during much-needed work—but also building new housing. I was so excited on Saturday to visit the first house built under the stimulus package. It was terrific to go to Blaxland with the member and see a home that was built by Degree Constructions, a small building company headed by Bob Geybi. The site supervisor there, Adam Iacono, told me that 52 separate tradespeople had been on that site, and three apprentices, including one young apprentice who had been hired specifically in response to the social housing stimulus work that this company had picked up. Jack Tsoi was hired as an apprentice because of this work that Degree Constructions had got through the social housing stimulus package; and Nick Ferris and Aaron Ridolfi, two other apprentices, were there on the day as well. I had a lovely chat to them; they are terrific young men. Adam said that Degree Constructions was also building 15 units in Guildford and another freestanding house in Villawood as part of the stimulus package. He was terrifically pleased. He was saying not a lot of work was out there in the current circumstances, and they were very, very grateful for the work that was coming through the social housing stimulus package.

But it is not just them. It is not just the builders and electricians and bricklayers and carpet layers and plasterers and tilers. It is also the people who supply those materials right across Australia where those materials are being manufactured.

I was very fortunate to meet the Sada family, who will be moving into their home tomorrow. I think that Tuesday or Wednesday was going to be moving day for Mr and Mrs Sada and their three children, including 13-year-old Jonathan who has cerebral palsy. This home is perfect for the needs of their family. Jonathan has a room with a tiled floor. The hallways are wider and the walls are reinforced so that when he needs lifting equipment as he becomes older and larger and heavier, lifting equipment can be put in. There is a bathroom into which he can be wheeled more easily, and his mother and father will not have to break their backs lifting him in and out of the shower, as they were doing previously. This home is perfect for this family. It has got a 3,000-litre water tank. They are using the water for the toilets, the laundry and the gardens. It has got energy efficient appliances so that they will be saving on their electricity bills. It is a terrific story for the Sada family.

It is also a terrific story for Degree Constructions and for the work that they provide and the work that they are doing with their own tradespeople, their subcontractors and the suppliers. It is good news all round to see the work that was supported through the nation-building economic stimulus plan by this side—though not by that side, mind you—providing homes for Australia’s neediest people, and jobs. Jobs in construction are one of the biggest employers in this country.

Northern Australia: Resources

Mr KATTER (3.16 pm)—My question without notice is to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister would be aware that the northern one-third of Australia has over 50 per cent of our arable land and 305 million...
megalitres of our annual rainfall, whilst the remaining two-thirds has only 83 million megalitres. Since the southern two-thirds produces 89 per cent of Australia’s agriculture, most off the Murray-Darling, would he not agree that past governments have overtaxed the south’s resources, whilst in sharp contrast north Australians have suffered an ever-increasing deprivation of their land and water resources? Finally, in the light of this, could the Prime Minister consider the radical proposed North Australia clean energy corridor which, whilst providing one-tenth of the government’s clean energy targets, would only utilise a miniscule one-tenth of one-hundredth of this water and land resource? Alternatively, could the Prime Minister remove the reference to ‘golden soil and wealth for toil’ from our national anthem?

Mr Rudd—I thank the member for Kennedy for one of his characteristically challengingly questions. I also note, by the way, for the honourable member asking this question, that part of the government’s nation building for recovery program includes a $18 million investment in the Ironsley Bridge in the honourable member’s electorate. I understand that it is a project which has been waiting some decades to be done. I understand that previous governments may have neglected to invest in that bridge. We are proud of the fact that we have done so. I am proud of the fact also that the minister for infrastructure has sought to intervene here. As I think he said himself, this particular proposal constituted an exception to the normal consideration of this matter, particularly given the impact which flooding has had on local communities over such a long period of time.

On the broader question which the member asks, about clean energy—and he made a particular reference to a clean energy initiative—I am not familiar with its detail. However, if the initiative is well constructed and well deliberated on, then I am confident that both the minister for the environment and the minister for energy would be keen to examine it and to provide him with a direct response.

On clean energy more broadly, I simply say this. Firstly, the government of course has embraced a renewable energy target for Australia. Secondly, the government has also in the budget allocated some $4.5 billion for investment in a range of clean energy proposals, one of which relates to how we advance clean coal technologies across Australia. The $2 billion-plus proposed investment in a range of clean coal technologies, both brown and black coal, against the raft of carbon capture and storage technologies is very important to the future of our coal industry. On the pure renewables side, our proposal to allocate some $1.4 billion to $1.5 billion for investment in what the government hopes will be the largest solar energy project anywhere in the world, equivalent to 1,000 megawatts, is also worth backing.

The third element of the government’s clean energy strategy rests upon the other category of renewable energy projects. While the minister for energy is absent today, I am sure that he would not mind me saying that the response to his application for tender and applications of expressions of interest from the renewable energy sector in response to the government’s $500 million renewable energy fund has been quite extraordinary. My recollection is that there are more than 60 projects put forward—small ones, and medium to large ones—and from memory the range goes from something like two megawatts to something like 200 megawatts across the entire raft of energy technologies, including solar, wind, wave, tidal, geothermal, as well as others. This is an important part also of Australian moving to a cleaner energy future.
This is what the government are doing by way of direct investment or co-investment with businesses, including our largest coal companies down to our smallest renewable energy companies, in order to place Australia onto a more secure renewable energy footing for the future. Secondly, we are also seeking to do so by advancing our renewable energy target as well.

I might just add one more point to the honourable member’s question. Part and parcel of getting the price signals for this right, of course, is to seek early passage of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme through the parliament. This government have endorsed and ratified Kyoto. We have put forward a clear proposal as to how we intend to deal with this. We have obtained support from the three principal conservation organisations—the Climate Institute, the WWF, as well as the ACF. We have obtained support also from the BCA and from the AiG. We are therefore advancing this proposal—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Rudd—It is interesting that those opposite would again seek to launch attacks on industry organisations with whom from time to time they may politically disagree. But returning to the point about the CPRS, the government is proceeding with what is necessary for the nation to establish long-term predictability for the price of carbon and also to encourage the further development of the renewable energy sector in Australia. That is really important.

Our strategy is clear. After listening to Senator Boswell today, I would like to know where those opposite stand on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. They say that they are engaging the government in dialogue. The National Party said today that the government has no hope of obtaining any National Party support. I look forward to what leadership is provided by the Leader of the Liberal Party on this matter when the joint party room meets within the next 24 hours.

Renewable Energy

Mr Raguse (3.22 pm)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. How is the Australian government supporting solar technologies and helping grow the green economy?

Mr Garrett—I thank the member for Forde for his question. The Rudd government has delivered more solar panels, more solar hot water systems and more support for solar power than at any time in our history. Part of that commitment was to deliver $150 million over five years for the Solar Homes and Communities Plan, but since the federal budget the government’s commitment to solar homes and communities now totals close to $500 million. This support translates to the highest ever uptake of solar panels on Australian rooftops, ahead of the transition to the solar credits under the expanded renewable energy target. In February, the government boosted the solar hot water rebate to $1,600 and removed the means test previously put in place by the present Leader of the Opposition. Unlike the previous government, this government is fundamentally committed to replacing energy intensive hot water systems with clean solar hot water. A boosted solar hot water rebate is designed to do one thing exactly—and that is to provide a maximum number of Australian households with a maximum number of Australian jobs. When I was in Perth on 22 April, I visited the Rheem hot water factory at Welshpool. The CEO from Rheem said this about the boosted solar hot water rebate: ‘Firstly, these incentives will address climate change very, very quickly. Secondly, it will stimulate what I believe is a vital Australian industry at a critical time. It will create additional jobs as long as it’s directed towards local industry
and local manufacture.’ And that is the government’s intention.

The government is delivering on solar schools, with over 4,000 schools around Australia already registered as part of this $480 million program. In last week’s budget, as the Prime Minister has just pointed out, the government announced an unprecedented investment of $1.365 billion for the Solar Flagships program—solar flagships to create an additional 1,000 megawatts of solar generation capacity. This is imagination, it is innovation, it is the kind of infrastructure that Australians want to see investment in and it is what this government is doing now. It will provide the opportunity for 1,000 megawatts of solar power to be generated in Australia. That will consolidate Australia’s place as a leader in solar technology.

There is no policy in place from those opposite on solar power. We know that the member for Flinders jumped out of a plane to tell us that solar panels were at record lows when solar panels were going to record highs, but we are reaching the point of public policy credibility for the Leader of the Opposition. He does not have a solar policy and, at the same time, he does not have a policy on the CPRS. While we are investing in solar infrastructure, providing Australians with the opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, supporting jobs and local infrastructure, the opposition are left in no-man’s-land. It is time they took some action and it is time they looked at the good solar policies of the Rudd government.

Budget

Mr SIMPKINS (3.26 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Is the Treasurer aware of the apparent memory loss of the member for Petrie this morning when she conveniently was unable to recall the deficit figure in the budget? Will the Treasurer help the member for Petrie now and inform the House of the deficit figure in the budget that he could not bring himself to mention on budget night?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer might be keen to answer that question, but I am not sure whether it is in order. The question is out of order.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on your ruling, and which I am happy for you to revisit, the question is within the Treasurer’s responsibility. He is responsible for the budget papers. He is responsible for the deficit figure. As a member of this House, the member for Petrie was not able to recall the deficit this morning on the doors. The Treasurer has been asked if he could talk about the budget deficit figure and he appeared to be prepared to do so. I ask you to ask him to answer the question. It is completely in order.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer is not responsible for the actions of the member for Petrie and, as I understood it, the question was inviting the Treasurer to give some sort of lesson to the member for Petrie.

Mr Simpkins—Mr Speaker, the question was whether you could ask the Treasurer to inform the House about the budget.

The SPEAKER—No. That was not how you framed the question. The question is out of order.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the question asked him to inform the House about the budget. What could be more in order than to ask him to inform the House of the deficit figure in the budget? He did not want to on budget night and he has been protected from doing so today. If he wants to, he should be given the opportunity.

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will resume his seat—and he is warned, not because he raised a point of order but for the way in which he handled himself at the dis-
patch box. That was not my recollection of the question. The member has indicated that he was trying to change the question to make it in order.

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, I believe that *Hansard* will show that the question was: will the Treasurer help the member for Petrie now and—

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order. I have ruled on the question. The member for Longman has the call.

Budget

Mr SULLIVAN (3.30 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline to the House why the decision to raise the pension age is a tough but necessary reform for Australia’s long-term economic future?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for his question because it goes to a necessary reform in the parliament to provide the single greatest addition to the single age pension for the future. This government proudly backs what was announced on budget night to aid those millions of pensioners around Australia who will benefit from this particular reform. I noticed on budget night that those opposite said, ‘That was our policy.’ For 12 years they had an opportunity to act on the single age pension and they did absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing! Then, a bit like we have seen in the debate today in relation to infrastructure, what they have done is say: ‘We sort of meant to kind of support it. Out there in the community we are going to tell people that we really did support it, but back in Canberra we don’t want to fess up to the fact that that’s really what our position was.’

The Australian people actually see through the double standards of all of that. They saw a government here for 12 years, awash in cash, with $300 billion-plus in revenue coming in off the back of the mining boom beyond the budget parameters. They see this government wrestling with a $210 billion budget revenue collapse because of the global recession, yet they see this government addressing fundamentally the needs of single age pensioners with a necessary reform for the future.

The other part of achieving the sustainability of the age pension for the future, however, is to make sure that we make retirement income policy in general, and the age pension in particular, sustainable in the long term. That is why the government have embraced a range of tough spending proposals for the budget, which we announced on budget night—$22 billion worth. These proposals are tough, they are difficult and many of them will actually cause the government considerable difficulty in our communication with the Australian public. But they are necessary for the long term because we need to make sure that, in providing pension reform for all those Australians who need that support, we are also ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability. That is why we have taken the position that we have in relation to the age entitlement for the age pension and that is why it will be moved along the lines which were outlined by the Treasurer on budget night.

On top of that, however, I noticed very carefully that those opposite seem to be wobbling around a bit on the question of the age pension. I noticed that as soon as we announced this, again, quick as a flash, the good old member for Warringah, the shadow minister for families, was up and about saying that that was his policy too. In fact he was saying they would bring in the upping of the age pension entitlement age earlier than us. I think that is accurate. I do not think I am misrepresenting you, Tony. I think I have it exactly right—he nods in agreement—that the Liberals’ position is to up the age pension entitlement age before the government.
We have said quite plainly that we think that age pensioners should be given plenty of time to prepare. That is why we will not start introducing this change until 2017 and we will therefore not bring it into full operation until 2023. The Liberals and those opposite seem to be quite uncomfortable about these dates and indicated on day one of the budget, through their relevant shadow minister, that their position was not to bring it in in 2017 but to bring it in much earlier. I take it, given the absence of any repudiation of that position, that that is the formal position of the Liberal Party.

Then I seemed to see some criticism this morning about the government’s ‘consultation processes’ on this matter. Are we beginning the great Leader of the Opposition crabwalk on this position as well? The Leader of the Opposition was always for an emissions trading scheme until one was actually introduced into the parliament. The Leader of the Opposition was always for a whole range of things including infrastructure investment until hard decisions had to be taken. The Leader of the Opposition was supporting the shadow minister for families, with whom he has such a close personal working relationship, on the question of upping the age pension entitlement age until we saw the debate beginning to unfold at the doors this morning.

The question which the nation at large would like to know is: what date will the Liberal Party propose to bring this in? Ours is plain—2017 through until fully operational in 2023—and necessary to underpin long-term sustainability of the age pension. I would say to those opposite: are we still sticking to the position that the Liberals would bring this in earlier? If so, what is the date, or is this now a matter of inconvenience, profoundly so, within the inner sanctums of the Liberal Party? Given the silence on the part of those opposite I would suggest that we are about to see a crabwalk with pike on this question. The government’s policy is clear.

**Budget**

Mr PYNE (3.35 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education. Is the minister aware of Kieran Stubbs, a vision-impaired 18-year-old, whose family lives a three-hour bus trip away from Deakin University, where he has been accepted to study following his gap year? Given he planned his future around the rules as they were, how does the minister justify her changes to the youth allowance from 1 January 2010, which condemn Kieran to giving up his dream of tertiary education? Why should regional students such as Kieran pay the price for the government’s reckless spending?

Ms GILLARD—I genuinely thank the member for Sturt for this question because it enables me to answer some of the outrageous scaremongering he has been engaged in. On budget night the government outlined some responsible reforms to student income support. Why did we do that? Because the information in the Bradley review clearly showed that this was a program that had problems with its targeting. That is, income support was going to families high up the income spectrum, including families that earned more than $200,000 a year and including families that earned more than $300,000 a year.

Faced with that, this government took the tough decision to actually better target student income support. What have we done? No. 1: most people who qualify for student income support qualify because of their family income. We have increased the family income thresholds where people will qualify. Where people would have cut out at low family incomes, now families can get support further up the income spectrum. So many families who would have been in the
range of $80,000, $90,000 and $100,000 and who would have missed out under the Liberal Party’s scheme will get support under our scheme. Secondly, we have made more generous the way in which students are treated as independent by virtue of their age. Under the Liberal Party’s scheme independence was classified as being 25 years of age. We are going to phase that back to 22 years of age. Both of these measures mean more students will qualify. Yes, we have financed those beneficial changes in a tough decision by changing one of the ways in which students qualify to be considered independent and judged on their family income. In terms of the actual way in which students are treated, the ways in which students have been assessed to be independent have been changed, and that is because the evidence in the Bradley review very clearly showed that it was those work test independence ways of being assessed which were leading to this skew of students and their families getting money at the upper income end of the scale.

I have got a very clear emerging test here for the member for Sturt—and I will come to the individual example he raises in a moment. My very clear test to the member for Sturt is this—and it goes to the theme of the opposition’s attack today which has just outlined its opportunism to anybody watching or anybody listening: we have restructured these benefits so more students benefit. More than 30,000 extra students net benefit. We have restructured these benefits so that more than 30,000 students get more money, we have restructured these benefits so that tens of thousands more students get a student start-up scholarship to help with their course costs at the start of the year and we have restructured these benefits to provide relocation assistance to more people than it was available to before.

The choice here for the member for Sturt is very clear: is he going to cut all of these increased benefits in order to finance keeping the work test as it is now—I am not surprised he is running off—knowing that some of that money goes to families who earn $200,000 and $300,000 a year or is he going to make a complete laughing stock of the Leader of the Opposition by saying that we should put more money into this area of government policy? That means, of course, everything the Leader of the Opposition has ever said about debt and deficit will be viewed as a complete farce because he will have authorised one of his shadow ministers going on an expenditure blitz to blow the budget. I will wait to see which it is. I will also wait to see, when this is dealt with in the Senate, whether the word of the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer that the only budget bill they are blocking is the private health insurance bill is worth anything—another great test for the two of them and for the Liberal Party overall.

On the question of the individual raised by the member for Sturt, if he provides me with the full details, of course I will look at it, and I will look at whether or not on a proper examination of the new income tests the person he is engaged in scaremongering—the person he is frightening and the person’s family that he is frightening—is actually eligible.

Indigenous Communities

Mr HALE (3.43 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Will the minister update the House on plans to improve living conditions in the Alice Springs town camps?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Solomon for his question. Yesterday the government took the first step towards compulsory acquisition of the Alice Springs town camps. I have taken this action after very serious consideration and in the interests of making sure we give children in these town
camps a chance at a safe, healthy and happy life. Anybody in this House who has been to these Alice Springs town camps knows that action is now urgently required. Living conditions are nothing short of appalling. Whether it is acute overcrowding, substandard housing, feral dogs, cockroach infested homes, alcohol abuse or violence—whatever it might be—these town camps, in fact, look more like a war zone than the outskirts of a country town in Australia. They have also been the site of horrific crimes. For many of the people in these town camps, the most basic human right to a safe and healthy life is simply absent.

For 10 months, the Australian and Northern Territory governments have been negotiating with Tangentyere Council to implement a plan to transform these town camps. We have explored many different avenues to seek an agreement. Last month, we increased the offer from $50 million to $100 million to upgrade and build new houses and infrastructure in these town camps. I have also made available $25 million for additional accommodation and other emergency facilities and intensive support services in the Alice Springs area.

Last Thursday, the final deadline for our negotiations closed. Tangentyere Council, unfortunately, have refused our offer. They will not agree to a fair and consistent tenancy management system. The Australian government and the Northern Territory government cannot agree to a system that does not give tenants in these town camps the same protections that apply to other Australians in other public housing areas. Without proper tenancy arrangements, the government’s plan to transform these town camps cannot succeed. It is also the case that Tangentyere Council have reneged on a work plan that was agreed to almost a year ago.

I now have no option but to take this step towards compulsory acquisition if we are to have any chance to improve the lives of residents. None of us want to stand by any longer and see the horrific levels of violence, abuse and despair continue in these town camps. It is still possible for Tangentyere Council to accept our offer before 6 July. But I have to say to all concerned that the time for negotiation is now over.

Education

Mr CHESTER (3.45 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education. I refer the minister to her failure to answer the member for Sturt’s question. Will the minister guarantee that students currently in their gap year will not be financially penalised under the government’s changes to eligibility criteria for the independent youth allowance? Or will the minister make regional students pay the price for the government’s reckless spending?

Ms GILLARD—With the greatest respect to the member, what a very silly question—which was produced by the member for Sturt. The answer to the member’s question is clear: yes, the government is changing the system. Why is the government changing the system? Because we are a responsible government that believes that every dollar of student support—indeed, every dollar of government expenditure—should go to the place that it is going to do the most good. When we see a financing system with benefits going to the upper end we ask the question: can we do better to target people in need?

The member would not have heard this from the member for Sturt, but the Bradley review, for instance, found that 36 per cent of students who were living at home and who were receiving youth allowance through having been considered independent were from families with incomes over $100,000.
and 10 per cent were from families with incomes over $200,000. When you see a result like that, you should ask the question: can we do better? What we have done is something that will be better for students generally. We have reoriented this system so that, rather than being pitched in that way, it will support families in ordinary income ranges. As the member would know, incomes in regional Australia tend to be less than incomes in metropolitan Australia, so any regearing of the system that puts money—

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The question was specifically about students in their gap year this year who have taken a gap year because—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. You have raised the point of order of relevance. I do not have to invite you to debate the point of order unless I require it. On the matter of relevance, the Deputy Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms Gillard—On the member’s question where he asked me about the impact on regional students, I am explaining that, because regional Australia tends to have lower incomes than Australia generally, any system that reorients towards people in ordinary income ranges is better for regional Australia. Let me give the member one example.

Mr Hartsuyker—Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cowper will resume his seat. I have indicated that the Deputy Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms Gillard—To take an example which would have meaning for the member, given his electorate, under the new system that we are proposing a family from the bush with two kids of university age who have to move to study will now be able to automatically receive some support with a family income of up to $139,388. That figure has been increased from the Liberal figure of $75,000 in family income. You can see from those two figures the huge expansion in family income thresholds that will make a difference to people in his electorate. Then there are our Student Start-up Scholarships of $2,254 per year. We are estimating that 146,000 students will be eligible for them next year. That is 133,700 more than currently.

Then, of course, on top of that there are our relocation scholarships to benefit the kinds of kids in the member’s electorate who need to move to study. This is a system that overall will give extra student support—that is, 38,000 additional students will be on income support and 36,000 more will receive higher payments. I understand from the cat-calling that the position of the Liberal Party must be that they would prefer to give money to families with income over $200,000 and $300,000 a year than to see an extra 36,000 students get income support. They would prefer to do that than to see more students get more money. If that is the contemporary position of the Liberal Party, that says everything any Australian needs to know about their value system, and it is not very pretty indeed.

North Korea

Mr Murphy (3.53 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister advise the House concerning reports that North Korea has conducted an underground nuclear explosion?

Mr Stephen Smith—I thank the member for Lowe for his question. I am sure members will recall that in October 2006 North Korea conducted an underground nuclear explosion, which was subsequently verified by international agencies. That followed on a few months after a launch of a missile by North Korea, albeit with limited
success. Members would also recall that last month North Korea also tested a missile, which was considerably more successful. Today the North Korean official state news agency has claimed that North Korea has conducted a successful underground nuclear test. The claim of a test itself is a very provocative act and the claim of a test itself is worthy of nothing other than the condemnation of Australia, which it gets, and the condemnation of the international community.

Australia condemned North Korea's missile launch last month and that condemnation was appropriately joined by the United Nations Security Council and others in our region and internationally. Very regrettably, I have to advise the House that the initial evidence is that North Korea has in fact conducted an underground nuclear explosion. Whilst it will take a couple of days to formally verify that through atmospheric tests, it appears from the early advice and scientific analysis that an underground nuclear explosion occurred in North Korea at 9.54 am local Korean time today or 10.54 am Australian Eastern Standard Time. Seismic activity in the order of a 4.5 Richter scale seismic event was picked up by Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation monitoring stations throughout the region, including in Australia. That data was transmitted by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation monitoring system to Vienna and from Vienna has been relayed to other national and international agencies, including our own Geoscience Australia.

As I indicated to the House, it will take a couple of days to confirm absolutely from atmospheric tests that this is indeed a nuclear underground explosion. Australia for the moment is proceeding on the basis that North Korea has conducted an underground nuclear explosion. On that basis, North Korea is in flagrant breach of its international obligations, is in flagrant breach of United Nations Security Council resolution 1718, and, as such, stands condemned.

Australia will conduct itself in the same manner it did after the missile launch by North Korea last month. We will immediately consult with our allies and our partners in the region, the United States, the Republic of Korea and Japan, and with their assistance take this matter to the Security Council. On the basis that North Korea has conducted a nuclear underground explosion, it deserves and gets nothing other than our absolute condemnation, and that condemnation should be echoed around our region and the globe. There is only one option for North Korea: it should immediately desist from all of these provocative acts; it should immediately comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions—in particular, resolution 1718; and it should immediately resume the six-party talks.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (3.57 pm)—On indulgence: there are media reports, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs said, that North Korea has conducted a nuclear test. There are also reports coming out of South Korea just half an hour ago that North Korea has also conducted a short-range missile test. These reports, as the foreign minister said, are yet to be verified, but both South Korean and United States authorities have reported that there are tremors in the area and therefore this provocative act is being taken seriously. The coalition joins with the government in supporting calls by Japan that the Security Council meet as soon as possible to consider the impact on regional peace and security that this provocative act or acts, if proven, will cause and in particular to take into account resolution 1718 of 2006, whereby the Security Council expressed its grave concern over the first nuclear test that occurred on 9 October 2006 and at that time demanded that North Korea cease all further nuclear tests and also cease
any ballistic missile testing. As members of the House know, North Korea did proceed with a long-range ballistic missile test in April of this year, and now we have these reports of a further nuclear test. The coalition joins with the government in condemning these provocative acts on the part of North Korea.

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, on this deeply disturbing note, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

SAMSON AND DELILAH AND MR CHARLES ‘BUD’ TINGWELL AM

Mr Garrett (Kingsford Smith—Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts) (3.59 pm)—On indulgence: I rise to note two significant events in Australia’s cultural and film history that have taken place over the past week. The first is the news today that the film Samson and Delilah, directed by Warwick Thornton, has won the coveted Camera d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. I know I join with all those in the House in offering our congratulations to Warwick Thornton and the cast and crew of the film. This film has had significant investment from the Indigenous film unit of Screen Australia, and I think it is a great testimony to the investment that that unit has made in Mr Thornton’s film. Having seen the film—it is powerful and at times harrowing—I can testify to the outstanding job that Warwick Thornton has done. This award is really significant and it will ensure that the film has a wider viewing audience. I certainly encourage all Australians to take up the opportunity to see Samson and Delilah. It received the audience award at this year’s Adelaide Film Festival and it is a film of great, powerful, moving images and performances.

I also take the opportunity to very briefly note the passing of eminent actor Bud Tingwell, a giant of the screen in Australia with performances ranging from a number of television series, including Homicide, to his performance in the film The Castle. Bud Tingwell was a mentor to many young actors. He was a continual presence in our television and screen industry for decades, particularly in the work that he did with Crawford Productions, and he will be sorely missed. I note as well his distinguished record as a Spitfire pilot in World War II. I was able to attend the service commemorating Bud Tingwell’s passing, along with many people from the television and entertainment industries. He was a generous man of good heart and a great actor, and his extraordinary service and wonderful personality, more than anything else, will be sorely missed.

Mr Ciobo (Moncrieff) (4.02 pm)—On indulgence: I join with the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts in congratulating Warwick Thornton, a 38-year-old graduate of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School who has made Australia proud. He certainly is a role model for Indigenous Australians everywhere and also for those who are involved in Australia’s film and TV industry. To be acknowledged, rewarded and recognised in such a prestigious way—with the Camera d’Or award—at the Cannes Film Festival is truly very significant. The particular significance of the film Samson and Delilah is its story. I have not had the privilege of seeing the film at this stage, but the fact that both Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton, who we all know are not always in uniform agreement, gave this film five stars in no small way underscores the significance of this film, which is considered to be a dark, poignant love story where essentially the entire story is told through pictures rather than through dialogue.

I also join with the minister for the arts in acknowledging the passing of a great icon of the Australian film and TV industry, Bud Tingwell, who passed away at 86 years of
age on 15 May 2009 at 8.15 am. The opposition joins with the government in conveying its condolences to his daughter, son and surviving family members, and we acknowledge this tremendous man and the impact that he has had on the Australian film industry in such terrific titles as *The Castle*, *Breaker Morant* and *Puberty Blues*.

**AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS**

Reports Nos 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 of 2008-09

The SPEAKER (4.03 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit reports Nos 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37 of 2008-09 entitled Audit report No. 32, Performance audit: management of the tendering process for the construction of the joint operation headquarters: Department of Defence; Audit report No. 33, Performance audit: administration of the petroleum resource rent tax: Australian Taxation Office; Audit report No. 34, Performance audit: the Australian Taxation Office’s management of serious non-compliance; Audit report No. 35, Performance audit: management of the Movement Alert List: Department of Immigration and Citizenship; Audit report No. 36, Performance audit: Settlement Grants Program: Department of Immigration and Citizenship; and Audit report No. 37, Performance audit: online availability of government entities’ documents tabled in the Australian Parliament.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

**DOCUMENTS**

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (4.04 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*, and I move:

That the House take note of the following document:

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs—White Paper—The road home: A national approach to reducing homelessness.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2009-2010**

Cognate bills:

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2009-2010**

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS) BILL (No. 1) 2009-2010**

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (4.05 pm)—This is indeed a dark day for the nation. We have heard today that even though the Treasurer, when asked, could not find in the budget documents what the level of debt of $315 billion was, he was quite happy to roll that out as the amount of debt this nation would have to sustain. It seems evident that the Treasurer is grossly incompetent, not knowing what his budget papers say or whether they reflect the true magnitude of the financial position this nation will soon find itself in. What is further concerning is that, whilst bond rates have been issued from three to four per cent, current bonds are now being issued at five per cent for three-, five- and 10-year terms. But in three years time—or five years time—as bonds are rolled over to fund this $315 billion worth of debt, what amount of interest will be paid? If a conservative view is taken of six per cent interest on current government bond issuance, $315 billion in a short space of four years—representing peak debt—will be $18 billion per annum in interest alone that this irresponsible government is happy to put on the shoulders of every Australian man, woman and child.
The Prime Minister will stand here and say: ‘The global financial crisis ate my lunch. This is not my responsibility. I did not cause this. The tsunami waves have come across the oceans. A great hammer has swept across the budget.’ Everyone is responsible except for the Prime Minister, who had the temerity prior to the last election to say, ‘The buck will stop with me.’ Clearly, when it comes to a budget with such astonishing and staggering debt, the buck is stopping with everyone but him.

On 4 February this year I spoke the following words when looking at Labor’s second stimulatory package:

There is an ugly fellowship—a not-so-secret society—that exists today. I call it the deficit or debt club. It remains unique. It knows no bounds or restraints. It is confined to no faction. It imposes no intellectual requirement and no geographic location. In the words of the mantra: union membership is required and blind adherence to collectivism is needed. No other circumstance or condition whatsoever, save the merit of lazy spending, shall entitle a Labor leader to membership of this fellowship as all post-war Labor leaders have received it.

Little did I know back in February how prophetic these words would be. Back then the government would still have us believe that their proposed $21 billion surplus for this financial year was still intact, even though a Treasury forecast could not survive any longer than 30 days without it being downgraded. And now we find that this financial year is not $20 billion in surplus but a staggering $32 billion in deficit, with a peak debt of $315 billion.

When it comes to debt, last week it was pointed out to that nervous little man, our Treasurer, that indeed the Costello-Howard years had left the nation with the budget in surplus and all debt paid off. A tirade came from the treasury bench saying that $50 billion worth of government bonds still existed showing that the Howard-Costello government had indeed not paid debt off. It staggered me that a Treasurer simply would not understand how the bond market works or how the Australian Office of Financial Management works. In the last two or three years of the Howard government a decision was made to keep $50 billion of bonds actively being traded within the financial sector to allow a series of AAA rated instruments to be traded. That money was raised and then put on deposit in full with the Reserve Bank, which then used it to fund a range of entities across the nation. The government’s balance sheet, which, clearly, the Treasurer has shown he is incapable of reading, showed a net debt of zero. But what is this to Labor leaders who have joined the fellowship of debt, who have cast the ring of deficit upon their fingers and have burdened the nation for the next 20 years with a horrible, unjust debt position?

The 2009-10 forecast is for a $58 billion debt. In 2010-11 there will be a further $57 billion deficit for the year. In 2011-12 there will be a $45 billion deficit. In 2012-13 there will be a $28 billion deficit. There will be a $188 billion deficit for the next financial year plus the three out years of the forward estimates—$188 billion of debt for the next four years. And if you add in the current financial year, with this horrendous $32 billion debt, you see a deficit of $220 billion over five years—$220 billion worth of debt with a peak debt of $315 billion.

And all of this is predicated on Labor not increasing expenditure above two per cent in real terms every year. Are you kidding me! We as a country are in this horrible mess because this Labor government cannot do anything except follow the Prime Minister’s mantra of ‘spend, spend, spend’. But he would have the audacity, the effrontery, to say, ‘We will keep expenditure below two per cent going right through six or seven years.’
What is worse is that the budget projections for 2011-12 and 2012-13 are based, amazingly, on a real GDP growth of 4.5 per cent, which is 1.5 per cent above the trend of the previous decades. Furthermore, the government assumes that from 2011-12 to 2016-17 there will be six straight years of growth at 4.5 per cent. The fact that this has only occurred twice in the last 30 years and the fact that we never achieved 4.5 per cent growth in GDP in any of the last 12 years of economic sunshine—of the most amazing economic conditions that have existed on the planet, when Australia’s economy was seen as the miracle of the OECD and hailed as such from the four corners of the globe—seems entirely superfluous to this government, which believes that from 2011-12 we will see 4.5 per cent growth every year for six years. It is absolutely and utterly staggering. It is historical nonsense to think that that could occur.

And then the government hides behind the Treasury by saying that it is Treasury modelling, which the government has taken at face value, and criticises anyone who would dare to stand up and question it. Let me put this government on notice: the Treasury is not a sacred cow. Since coming to parliament in 2007 I am yet to see a Department of Treasury forecast actually hold water for longer than a few months. So forgive me for the scepticism I have when Treasury, supported by the government, say that from 2011-12 we will see 4.5 per cent growth every year for six years. The problem is not that the global financial crisis has eaten the Prime Minister’s lunch. The problem is that the Prime Minister has wilfully spent money in the most enormous, grandiose proportions we have seen outside of wartime Australia.

On top of this, he has increased tax by $26 billion, hiding behind the mantra that tax has not been increased as a proportion of GDP. Then there is the impact of policy decisions on this budget. This budget’s policy decisions have worsened it by $97 billion. This does not even begin to include the Prime Minister’s fanciful Ruddnet—$43 billion which the Prime Minister says will be a great investment. The fact that it will be twice the capitalised value of Telstra did not come into it, nor did the fact that there is no product disclosure statement and no advice on return. There is no advice on anything. But the Prime Minister actually said that this would be a good investment.

If any Australian were to stand there and say, ‘Invest in this product: I have no disclosure statement; I have no idea of return; I have no idea of profitability,’ it would be considered a crime and investigated accordingly. Yet this Prime Minister can roll that out with $43 billion of taxpayers’ money.

This worsened budget position caused by government spending does not include Ruddbank—$28 billion worth of the Prime Minister seeking to bail out commercial ongoing.
property with interests that are falling over. The budget for the following year, 2009-10, has savings of $24 billion—1½ per cent. Yet it has new expenditure: over $45 billion. The mantra was: ‘A horror budget; a dreadful budget. Everyone will have to do their part to find savings.’ There is $24 billion worth of savings, yet there is new Labor expenditure of over $45 billion. If the fiscal position of this nation were not in such a parlous, dreadful position, what this government has done would almost be laughable. They have completely and utterly lost control of public finances.

Unemployment at the election was four per cent. It is now forecast for 2009-10 to be 8.25 per cent, rising the following year to 8.5 per cent—a million people unemployed. Yet the stimulus package this government rolled out in December last year—$10 billion cash handaways—would create 75,000 jobs, we were told. Yet unemployment went up. The second stimulus package, which I was proud to vote against because of its recklessness, said it would support 200,000 jobs. And then, in the budget speech, the Treasurer spoke about all of these stimulus messages sustaining 200,000 jobs. ‘Creating’, ‘supporting’, ‘sustaining’—at least the nation can be happy the Treasurer knows what an active verb is. Yet 200,000 jobs being sustained, with the amount of money in the stimulus package, indicates each job sustained is at the cost of a quarter of a million dollars.

The coalition will vote in this House against the 30 per cent rebate being means tested. I personally will stand here and defend the 73,392 constituents in my electorate who have private health insurance. I will defend their right to choose the type of healthcare cover they want for their families. I will stand here and defend them against an ideological attack where Labor simply does not like the idea that people can choose to have a benefit; they can choose to have something different; they can choose to have private health insurance or indeed private education. I will defend the 73,392 constituents of the northern Gold Coast who have chosen private health insurance for their families. Means testing it will simply throw millions of Australians, potentially, out of private health insurance onto a public health system that is failing.

It is ironic Mr Rudd and his government—where the buck stops with him—said, ‘After 18 months, if the public health system is failing, I will step in.’ Well, Mr Rudd, in Queensland right now there are 36,000 people on the waiting list for elective surgery. There are 159,000 people waiting to get on the waiting list for elective surgery. If that is not a crisis in Queensland health, I do not know what is. A state Labor government unable to pay off their $74 billion debt and now looking to flog government owned corporations to the market—even though those corporations are themselves saddled with debt—shows the parlous position that Queensland is in and that Queensland health is in.

This government talks about being a nation-building government. It is so easy to roll out terms. It is so easy to talk up the big, lofty concepts. ‘We’re about building infrastructure,’ the member for Grayndler says. Bless Lord Albo of Grayndler, because $1.7 billion of the government’s promised $22 billion is to be scheduled in 2008-09. Another $1.5 billion is scheduled in 2009-10 and the rest will be flowing—almost $20 billion—after the economy is forecast to kick-start itself again in 2010-11. If you were going to roll out infrastructure as part of nation building, wouldn’t you do it now?

But what we had today, of course, is more government spin. Suddenly they have plucked out 35,000 projects that will be funded. I ask the minister at the desk: Minister, table a list of them. You have said there
are 35,000. I gather you have counted them. Table them. Show the nation what they are. Produce the report that shows exactly what these 35,000 projects are. There will be a crane in every backyard, we are led to believe—infrastructure projects ad infinitum across the nation. Table the 35,000. Senator Arbib was on Sky this morning claiming there were 35,000. The Prime Minister claimed there were 35,000. Show me the cranes, Minister. Produce the list of 35,000 so that the nation may have confidence in you, because your budget papers simply say that the bulk of your money will be spent in something like 18 months to two years time. The bulk of your budget papers fly in the face of your 35,000 shovel-ready, crane-ready projects across the nation.

But, then again, it is hard to take this government on face value. The Prime Minister said he would take a meataxe to the Public Service. Clearly, the meataxe I use on a leg of lamb is a little different to the one the Prime Minister uses, because staff numbers have actually increased. The Prime Minister has increased political staff numbers by 30 per cent. The Prime Minister has increased both the ranks of Public Service numbers and political numbers. I guess his meataxe is a little blunt, or perhaps it is not a meataxe at all but a rather limp sausage.

Let us move on to the area of obstetrics. Women charged the average fee for private obstetric care will end up paying $500 more for their treatment under changes to the Medicare safety net—unless, of course, doctors reduce their charges. Well, that is standing up for health care! Well done. I am sure the pregnant women of this nation, which includes my wife, will be incredibly proud of what the government has done—perhaps not as proud as those desperately hurting families who want to have children, who pray earnestly every night for the opportunity to have a little baby of their own and who move on to IVF to increase their chances. I have walked the path with a good pastor friend of mine, Steve Peach. He and his wife, Belinda, tried IVF 10 times before having Zoe Peach, their beautiful gift from the Lord, their beautiful baby. If that were to occur after these changes, IVF costs would increase by $2,000—$2,000 more for the most vulnerable and hurting in our community.

This budget is a farce. Consumer confidence as at 20 May had taken its second biggest fall in 10 years. Is it any wonder, when faced with peak debt of $315 billion and what goes with it? (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I will remind the honourable member for Fadden that he should, under standing order 64, refer to other honourable members by the name of their division or by their position.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (4.25 pm)—I have to just reflect, if I may. I remember very well a meataxe of a different flavour in 1996 hitting my community with such vengeance that it threw Canberra into a recession. I just want the previous speaker, the departing member for Fadden, to think about that.

Due to the global financial crisis, I find myself rising to give quite a different speech on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and cognate bills to the corresponding speech that I delivered last year. Last year one of the government’s main concerns was to fight inflation, which at the time was at its highest domestic level for over 16 years. How quickly circumstances can change. We now find ourselves in the midst of the worst economic crisis that the world has seen in over 70 years. Because of the global financial crisis, the world economy is expected to contract by about 1½ per cent in 2009. Australia’s major trading partners are expected to contract by about two per cent. This is a
worse outcome than even the Asian economic crisis. All of this is having a direct effect on the Australian economy. Our terms of trade are expected to fall by 13¾ per cent in 2009-10. This will take approximately $35 billion out of the economy. Nominal GDP will fall by 1½ per cent in the same financial year. This represents the biggest fall in nominal GDP in the postwar era.

Last year I said that I was pleased that the first Labor budget in over 11 years had started a new era of responsible, long-term economic management. I am pleased to say that the second Labor budget for this government continues this era, despite its critics, and albeit in a somewhat different manner. Last year, the main priority was inflation. Now it has turned to unemployment. Already the number of Australians looking for a job has increased by 175,000. The most recent unemployment statistics from the ABS show a small contraction in unemployment, and although this was very welcome news and gave the nation a glimmer of hope I fear and we fear that unemployment will rise over the next few years. Unemployment is predicted to rise to six per cent by June of this year, and in two years time after that, in June 2010, another 300,000 people are expected to be unemployed. It is estimated that unemployment will peak in 2011 at about 980,000. This is the highest figure since 1992.

As the Treasurer stated at the National Press Club the other day, this government has no higher priority than minimising unemployment and helping families hold on to their jobs and homes. The budget that this government has brought down this year will do a lot to ensure that the government delivers on this priority. However, a lot of this work has already been undertaken through the government’s quick and decisive action by way of the two economic stimulus packages and measures such as the government’s decision to guarantee Australian bank borrowing. Without this measure, our banks would not have been able to raise enough funds to lend to individuals, families and businesses both big and small. Without this measure, the Australian economy would have ground to a halt or come very close to it.

There have been many critics, including from the opposition, of the government’s decision to make urgent cash payments to many households. Without these payments, consumer spending would have suffered. I have been speaking to my local retailers—I am a great shopper, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I am out there talking to them all the time. They are emphatically telling me that their better than expected retail figures in recent months are a direct result, in their view, of those very cash payments.

It is worth remembering that approximately 1½ million people are employed in the retail sector in this country. Without these payments, many of those Australians who work in the retail sector would now find themselves out of work. The money that the government has already invested in schools and public housing means that about 35,000 building sites are springing up around the country, despite what the previous speaker was raving on about. In meetings I have had with the ACT government, including as early as this morning, I have been made aware of the speed at which these programs are being picked up. I am really very pleased that they are progressing quickly and efficiently and that they are proving very successful. Here in my town I want to commend the ACT government for working hand in hand with us at the federal level to see these programs come through quickly and efficiently.

The increase in the First Home Owner Grant has ensured that new building approvals are up and that the housing market has not gone into a slump. I would like to relate a
story told to me by a constituent in my electorate who is currently looking at purchasing a home. He told me that he and his wife have gone to about 30 house inspections over the last few weekends. He claims that nearly every one of these inspections is akin to a very busy marketplace; homebuyer traffic at these inspections is pretty heavy. He also claims that, invariably, a property will be advertised on either Thursday or Friday and will probably be under offer by the following Monday. When this government was elected, one of the major issues facing Australian families was homeownership affordability. The government pledged to fix this problem. Therefore, one of the most pleasing aspects of the extension of the First Home Owner Grant is that it enables people to buy their own home who might never have had the chance to do so.

Another of the government’s earlier announcements that will not only help Australia through these tough times but also be a vital infrastructure investment for the nation is the government’s investment, together with the private sector, to build a super-fast national broadband network. About a month ago, I received an email from one of my constituents who lives in the Hermitage apartment block in Chifley, which is one of the older suburbs in the electorate of Canberra—it is basically central Canberra. The apartment block itself would be a bit over 20 years old, I think. The constituent reminded me that, in a speech I gave in the House in March 2008, I stated that people who lived in her apartment block were unable to access broadband—and that is true. She asked me if I could find out if this situation had changed in the meantime. My staff made inquiries to Telstra in regard to this matter. The reply that I received read, in part:

Unfortunately these units are a little too far from the exchange. Some services on the street are able to access ADSL, as the services fall just within the provisioning limits. Unfortunately ADSL is not available at the Hermitage, as transmission loss is too great.

I was rather shocked to find that this was still the case. What on earth have Telstra been doing, when a block of apartments in central Canberra is just a little bit too far away to access ADSL? For Heaven’s sake! Did it ever occur to Telstra to just run another line a little further down the street? However, I know that the National Broadband Network will eventually rectify this problem for both the residents of the Hermitage in Chifley and many other residents not only here in Canberra but around the country.

This year’s budget builds on the government’s prompt and decisive actions to combat the global financial crisis. A historic $22 billion investment in the nation’s infrastructure will be spent on building and improving ports, roads and rail. This will lay the foundations for a more prosperous future—and it actually points to the lack of activity in this region over the last decade or so. This is something that those opposite should think about. There will be $64 billion, over five years, for the public hospital system. That is an increase of $20 billion, or approximately 50 per cent, on the previous Australian healthcare agreements. That is very welcome, but it is also very necessary to give the public healthcare system a bit of a go after the previous government’s neglect of it. There will be an increase of $5.3 billion in investment in the higher education sector. The number of university places will be uncapped, providing incentives for kids from disadvantaged families. There will be increased funding for research and commercialisation and more money for capital projects. I note that the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University, Ian Chubb, has welcomed the government’s investment in higher education. He said, in part:
I am … delighted that the Government has accepted that research and innovation will be important elements in economic recovery and that now is a time to invest. I recognise that in these difficult economic times these multiple investments reflect well on the Government’s commitment and its confidence in Australia’s universities.

Professor Chubb has stated that the funding at the ANU will be spent on two new chemistry buildings, a new science teaching building and a combined sciences workshop.

The extension of the First Home Owner Grant for an extra six months, beginning with a phase-out period starting in October, is a welcome initiative for the construction and real estate industries. For small businesses, the tax break on eligible assets will be increased from 30 per cent to 50 per cent. For full rate single pensioners, including age pensioners, disability support pensioners, war widows, veterans’ income support pensioners and widow B pensioners, there will be an extra $32.49 per week, and there will be an extra $10.14 per week for combined couples receiving the corresponding pensions. There will be more assistance for carers, through a legislated carer supplement of $600 per year for carer payment recipients and an additional $600 per annum for carer allowance for each eligible person in their care. There will be an investment of $731 million, over five years, for the implementation of a paid parental leave scheme starting from 1 January 2011.

The measures in the budget which will specifically benefit Canberra include $60 million for a world-class brain research centre at the Eccles Institute in the John Curtin School of Medical Research, $90 million for the ANU chemical sciences hub and $29.7 million for the ACT Integrated Cancer Care Centre. This is a very important investment in health in Canberra and the surrounding region, and it is part of the overall redevelopment of the Canberra Hospital campus. The centre will be located in a new building adjacent to the newly redeveloped radiation oncology unit and will centralise all cancer related services into a single integrated centre. For members of the community who have had incidences of cancer in their family, whether it be a child or an adult, this is an enormous decision and I welcome it warmly.

There is also $11.3 million for Questacon, not only to improve its education facilities in Canberra but also to deliver an outreach program that will include exhibitions, in-school presentations and digital online programs to promote children’s interest in science around the country. There is $50 million committed to the building of a new supercomputer infrastructure to be based in Canberra.

As I said earlier, the government is determined to see Australia through the worst of the global financial crisis and it has acknowledged that it has had to take a number of unpopular but necessary steps to ensure that the deficit is kept under some control and that we can in fact put money where it is most badly needed in the community. Some of these less popular decisions include the means-testing of the private health rebate. This decision means a single person earning over $75,000 a year will only get a 20 per cent rebate; those earning over $90,000, a 10 per cent rebate; and those earning over $120,000 a year will not receive a rebate. The corresponding earning amounts for couples are, for a 20 per cent rebate, over $150,000; for a 10 per cent rebate, over $180,000; and no rebate for those earning over $240,000. It was a hard decision, but the individuals and families out there who are not in those income brackets do not lose that rebate. So let us just keep this in the context of a debate on fairness.

So, when the previous speaker says he is going to fight for his 74,000 constituents
who pay private health insurance, I take it he means that all of them earn over $240,000 as a couple or $120,000 as an individual. Otherwise, he has not very clearly understood the arguments being put forward about the fair distribution of money in very tough times.

This decision will result in savings of $1.9 billion over the next five years. No wonder I am pleased to see a cancer centre come to Canberra as a result of those savings. Other decisions are a number of tax reforms, including the tightening of rules applying to non-commercial business losses and limiting the scope of tax exemption for foreign employment income.

One of the very pleasing aspects of this budget from my perspective is the very large investment in science, research and technology. The government has made a substantial commitment in areas such as the Education Investment Fund, Sustainable Research Excellence in Universities, postgraduate research and Super Science Fellowships. There are many more. However, one of the really standout investments in research is the $120 million that the government will provide to the CSIRO to construct a new marine research vessel to replace the ageing RV Southern Surveyor. The old vessel has become somewhat outdated, to put it mildly, and this new vessel will allow our scientists to progress our work at sea on climate change and variability, the development of resources located under the seabed and sustainable use of Australia’s biodiversity.

How do I best summarise this budget? I do so by looking at two contrasting parts. On the one hand, the opposition talk an awful lot about deficits, rates and borrowing. There is nothing wrong with talking about that; however, they do not give us any idea—and I have not heard one speaker yet do so—as to how they would solve the problems that the nation now faces. All they seem to want to do is talk about the economy in negative terms. They are forever talking the economy down, therefore, with a scare campaign about debt and deficit. Let us have that discussion, but let it be fair and balanced. What would they actually do? They need to tell the Australian people what their alternative plan is, but I have yet to hear it. On the other hand, on this side, the government not only talks about but also acts to address the nation’s challenges through spending in infrastructure, research and development, and innovation. In short, the government is more concerned about the future and is acting accordingly.

There is no doubt that some of our decisions around these subjects will not be popular with everybody, but there is a famous saying that you can please some of the people some of the time but not everybody all of the time. The government has had to make some really hard decisions in extraordinary circumstances. No-one can deny the circumstances in which we find ourselves. I am very pleased with the investment in the budget. The investment that we are seeing has a long-term life. It is going into education and health, things that stand the test of time, at a moment in our history when private funding is not around. The private sector is not able at this stage to come forward with that money. So what does the government do? It does its job. It comes forward and invests in the country and its people, and that is what this budget is doing.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (4.42 pm)—I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and cognate bills. This is not a budget to save Australia; it is a budget that is designed to create the statistical impression of a government that should be re-elected. It is a budget that accepts that those who will suffer its burdens will not vote for 10 or 15
years. Further, it turns to every socialist option to achieve its purpose.

The Hawke-Keating government sold the family silver of government enterprise to fund its expanding expenditure and, of course, borrowed about $80 billion in the five years of that process. Now the Rudd government commits borrowed funds to recreate that situation. We are to have a new government bank, Ruddbank, which is already identified as a mates bank in terms of its preference for the ailing shopping centre and apartment sector. The Treasurer seems to have one special project in mind. But, for instance—and I do not think we should have the bank and I do not think it should have this idea—they are not around to try and bail out failed forestry companies at the moment. It is all about mates. One can only wait for some Labor luminary to have his unserviceable overdraft of around $16 million written off, as has happened in the past—nice to have a government bank!

Now we are going to return telecommunications to the government and union domination, through the so-called broadband initiative. Whatever involvement the so-called private sector might have, it is not to exceed 50 per cent. The government is going to run the shop on the instructions of the trade union movement. I can tell you, I well remember that situation when I was first elected in 1980, when in one small country centre there were 160 outstanding applications to get a telephone. And how did you fix that? You got onto one of the techies and gave him a carton of beer. That is how you did it. Do we want to return to that situation? The previous Telstra management quite properly declined to participate in this political process that fell approximately $40,000 million short of the capital needed. They were criticised for a non-conforming tender when in fact, after the government’s announcement that it would go it alone, it was clear that all the private bids were non-conforming.

The role of the Future Fund, a government statutory authority, in this matter further demonstrates the influence of government over a so-called independent statutory authority. When you can replace the chairman, a one-time chief executive of the Commonwealth Bank, David Murray, what more power as a government do you need? Telstra does not need to be involved in this uncommercial activity and, as the protector of superannuation of the public sector, the board of the Future Fund should be telling Telstra to keep out of it and get on with utilising its existing network and cash flow to make commercial, not political, decisions in the interests of its shareholders, of which the Future Fund is the largest.

Furthermore, think about history. Once this network is in place—and if it is ever built it will overcome all other networks; your telephone and everything else will work through it—when will you be told how much you are going to pay next year? You will be told in the budget, just as the states tell consumers about electricity and water charges and those other matters that are still government controlled. That is the situation. Not only will future Australians be subject to higher taxation and reduced government services as a result of this debt binge, they will have to continue to fund the losses and maintenance of nearly every budget infrastructure initiative.

Take public housing. The Western Australian government in its recent budget has had to allocate $8.3 million simply for repairs of public housing trashed by its occupants. We are never told of the costs associated with unpaid rent. This $8.3 million indicates an annual cost of approximately $80 million of similar costs around Australia as we proceed to build the 20,000 home units.
Today we were informed of the estimated cost of $4.3 billion for a single project for 50 kilometres of passenger rail in Victoria—double the cost, apparently, of building a railway line from Melbourne to Brisbane. And, of course, that is not in the budget yet—that is only the feasibility study. This government is proposing to invest $3.2 billion of that $4.3 billion. There are commitments for passenger rail in the Gold Coast, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane, totaling more billions. However, on the day these projects come to completion they will start losing money, as they always do.

Then there are school buildings. There is the government’s $1.2 billion Investing in Our Schools Program, which was funded with cash and gave school principals and local parents groups the opportunity to spend up to $150,000 on buildings or equipment. On that occasion state government building agencies insisted on managing these projects, which no doubt they will do again, thus increasing costs by multitudes of up to three and deducting 15 per cent for their assistance in forcing the cost of the projects up that high. Very few schools in my electorate applied for the full amount of $150,000, although some could have wisely spent more. But this budget forces them to take another $200,000. It is like feeding a pate goose: you have it forced down your throat whether you need it or not. And if you really think you can spend it you can put your hand up for another $2 million. It is to ensure that there are sufficient qualified teachers in the relevant disciplines, science in particular. Prior to this budget, the Deputy Prime Minister and minister for everything else, Ms Gillard, lectured the parliament daily upon her education revolution. Yet this budget reduces the original commitment by $2 billion—probably because of a failure to get that money out on the ground. With her free computer initiative, for example, we know she has been told by New South Wales to go away. She estimated a cost of $1 billion when the total cost, taking installation, programming and maintenance into account, is more like $3 billion. However, in typical style we get covered assembly areas but not teachers.

Worse, students from rural areas contemplating a university education that might equip them to enter these disciplines have had their youth allowance rug pulled from under their feet. In a highly cynical move the government has changed the family income thresholds—and we heard the Deputy Prime Minister on this subject today—to make it appear that access is improved. Then they changed the qualifying criteria retrospectively. The previous rules to qualify for this allowance, which includes rent subsidies, were to enter the workforce to earn approximately $19,000 within an 18-month period. This allowed some young people to take quite high-paid jobs to aggregate the sum over 12 months.

But, whatever the circumstances, there is a serious situation where the government has changed the rules around their working arrangements. You might have a better income threshold, but if you have been working to those old rules you are now told that you have got to have two years gap and work 30 hours a week throughout that period. That is something like 75 per cent, I think, of the typical lower wage. Where do you get that sort of work in this environment? It is not
necessarily available. But worse, those who have already done, say, six or nine months under the old system are being told to start again. They will be waiting three years, as a country student dependent on the rent allowance, before they can go to university.

It is all right for the Deputy Prime Minister to tell us who is rich and who is poor in the country. When your child has got to go away from home you double your household costs. If you are on a low income, without some assistance like youth allowance, it is just impossible. Even if you have been more fortunate and have got a higher income, it is not an expense that is incurred by someone who lives close to a university. This is the area of fairness and equality. I have often said that the richer you are, the closer you tend to live to a university. Of course, some kids can walk to their tertiary institution. Nobody knows that better than you, Mr Deputy Speaker Washer, when you think of the plush suburbs of Perth and how they surround the University of Western Australia. But, the minute you live further than 50 kilometres away, you have got to relocate. In some cases where wives and others have moved out, it has led to family breakdown and all sorts of issues of that nature.

That is just the start of it. The biggest con of all has been practised on our pensioners. You, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the shadow minister for infrastructure, who is at the table, are both aware there was considerable debate in the latter years of the Howard government about the disparity between the single pension and the double pension. The gap was just too large. It created a situation, for instance, where on the death of a partner there was a very large reduction—notwithstanding that the only savings within that household was probably a little bit of food. We were all conscious of it. The single pensioner could not survive; the safety net had failed them.

We talked about what needed to be done about that. We lost government and we saw the circumstances of a new government and a new budget. What was in it for the pensioners? Nothing. So what did we do about that? We shamed them into noticing the issue, and our then leader brought to this House a private member’s bill to put single pensioners’ income up by $30 a week. Having made the appropriate inquiries, this government eventually gets the message that it ought to be $32 a week. It then says to the other pensioners, ‘While we are doing this, we will just give you an extra $10.’ It sounds good. But now the phones are ringing because, as of 30 June, the $500 per annum bonus—$10 a week—is to be discontinued. You give them 10 bucks on one hand and take the 10 away with the other. In the case of the single pensioner, where the government was advised they needed $32 a week, they are getting $22 a week because they are taking that $10 back.

That is just the sort of situation that we see throughout these situations. There is no valid argument for this action. There are other opportunities for savings, including the restriction—now retrospective, of course—of the $20 billion cash splash. A young woman known to me got three of them. Farmers are telling me about backpackers that worked on their farms some months ago and who paid a bit of tax. This tax was fully refunded because of the period of their employment and the fact that they did not reach the threshold to pay tax. The envelopes are turning up at the farmer’s addresses. The envelopes have $900 cheques in them and are addressed to these young people from New Zealand and from all over the world. We did that and while, yes, some of the pensioners got that money, others did not. What was the better way to approach this very important subject?
It is an issue of order of priorities. Is it the government’s view that the construction of school halls and the building of passenger railways is more important than the provision of a security net to those who have already served our community through their labours, who have paid their taxes and who have—by their efforts—delivered a better living standard to future generations?

The government has created a committee to review the Australian tax system with the intention, I understand, of making it more simple. A good tax system should provide simplicity, certainty and equity. Yet it is reported that many more Australians will now be required to employ a tax agent to negotiate themselves through the complexity of this budget and its range of income and other means tests. For example, the income threshold for exemption on employee shares—a matter of great controversy, I might add—is $60,000. But it is $250,000 for non-commercial tax losses. It is $150,000 for parental payments. And you can take your pick of $75,000, $90,000, $120,000—or the doubling of such—for couples for matters related to Medicare and health fund rebates. In my mind, that hardly sounds like simplicity, certainty or equity.

There is also a veritable potpourri of tests relevant to salary sacrificed superannuation, foreign income et cetera. One of the most amazing is to differentiate between employer-paid superannuation contributions above nine per cent, except if that contribution is mandated in a union industrial agreement. In other words, if you have got an industrial agreement that says that you have got to pay 12 per cent, it will not be subject to the tax arrangements. But, if you are just a good employer who wants to help out and the circumstances allow you to do so and you say to the workers that you are going to give them an extra three per cent, there will be a special tax on that. You just could not believe that there could be this sort of commitment under the trade union domination of this particular thing.

The small and medium businesses are to get 30 and 50 per cent investment allowances, but, of course, this presupposes they have business opportunities to employ the new equipment they might purchase, the funds to make the purchase and/or a sympathetic banker to provide a loan at a viable interest rate. I especially mention viable interest rates. The situation is that, with the government pulling money out of our economy in tranche upon tranche of up to $700 million at a time, it is very difficult for the banks to compete in that marketplace. It is very difficult for the share market because the institutions, the big superannuation companies, are buying the government bonds. They are safe and return low interest, but they are secure. They are not investing in driving share prices up to a level that is of some significance for someone who has put their whole superannuation future into shares with the thought that, ‘They are blue ribbon and I can sell them, probably, at a small profit as I need the money.’ You wonder why the banks are charging 10 and 15 per cent. When they go overseas to borrow money the interest rate might be right, but there are the additional costs, hedging against financial currency movements et cetera. Nevertheless, there is a good news story for small business: the budget creates an advisory bureau. Small business will now be able to ring up a public servant to find out how to run their business. I am sure that is going to be a great help. We just go on and on.

Today in the parliament I put a slightly different meaning on the word ‘relevance’. I have been here since 1980. I know what relevance means in this place—the relevance of this House to be able to deliver answers through the media who sit up in the gallery bored to tears as to what the government is
actually doing. The Prime Minister today could refer precisely to 3.8 per cent of GDP but did not know what the GDP would be, which might have allowed commentators to calculate the true size of that debt. He spoke for 10 minutes, and in the old days when I was here there would have been a mad rush by officials to provide him with that answer—which could now be got electronically. He did not want the answer. And this is the tragedy of this place. It has become irrelevant under this government.

If the Speaker thinks that he is constrained, he should read about the time when Billy Snedden was the Speaker—because when he was the Speaker he used the ultimate power of a Speaker. When ministers abused the rules of this place they were simply told to sit down, as I will now do. (Time expired)

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (5.02 pm)—I rise to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and cognate bills and start by setting out some of the key facts about the current economic situation, because those key facts are needed to frame any discussion of the budget and any discussion of the measures in the bills. First, we need to recognise that presently there is the most serious economic crisis that the global economy has faced in many years. Second, we should note that Budget Paper No. 1 outlines this in stark terms and includes facts like every advanced economy is now in recession, with the world economy expected to contract by 1½ per cent in 2009, and that global trade has collapsed. In 2009 it is expected to shrink by 11 per cent, more than in any other postwar period.

We have an Australia in recession and we will have an economic contraction of half a per cent in 2009-10. Most importantly in terms of framing this budget there has been a collapse in taxation receipts. There has been a downward revision of $173 billion over the four years to 2011-12, including $90 billion in company taxation and $30 billion in capital gains tax.

The budget is a response to the crisis which Australia and indeed the world economy are facing at this time. In conjunction with the economic stimulus strategy and the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, this budget marks the work of a government that is fully committed to ensuring that it supports the Australian economy and Australian jobs during this time of crisis. Across the suite of economic policies it has taken early and decisive action to secure Australia’s economic future.

The government have supported the financial system through the guarantee of bank deposits and wholesale funding and through the Australian Business Investment Partnership to provide refinancing of loans relating to commercial property assets in Australia. We have provided fiscal stimulus, exactly as any government should do during a global recession, through the Economic Security Strategy, the COAG reform package, the nation-building package and the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. Together these are measures which will raise the level of GDP by 2.75 per cent in the financial year 2009-10 and 1.5 per cent in the financial year 2010-11.

The challenge of any government during this period is twofold. First, it is to stimulate demand in the economy to support jobs. Second, it is to ensure that across the economic cycle we balance the budget and avoid the political temptations of running structural deficits. With this budget the Rudd government have risen to that challenge. We have put in place the foundations for Australia to see through this crisis and to come out of it stronger and better prepared for future prosperity. We are putting in place the basis for future productivity growth by investing in infrastructure and by investing in human
Supporting jobs and small business today by investing in the nation-building infrastructure we need for tomorrow is the theme striking this budget. The infrastructure expenditure includes measures such as investing in roads, rail and ports across the country; investing in the single largest school modernisation program in the country’s history; and investing in a clean energy initiative to create the world’s largest solar power plant.

I turn to the questions of debt and deficit, because there has been a great deal of discussion around the projected $57.6 billion deficit and the resultant government borrowing. You would have to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, that there is a debt fetish amongst those on the other side. The Liberal Party appears to be obsessed with debt instead of focusing on the economic circumstances which frame this budget. The budget has gone into deficit during a recession and that is due to a massive collapse in revenue resulting from the global economic crisis. There are two alternatives if those opposite want to reduce the deficit this year: they can slash government spending or they can increase taxes. Both of those would be counterproductive and damaging to Australia’s economy because those measures—that is slashing government spending or increasing taxes—would reduce demand, would reduce investment and would make life tougher for small businesses and for Australian workers.

If we believe the Liberals’ rhetoric about debt, we know that if they were in government right now they would be committing the greatest act of economic vandalism this nation has ever seen. The Liberals would slam the brakes on growth at a time of the greatest economic crisis in some 80 years. They would either, it seems, massively increase taxes or slash government spending, which would mean slashing spending on Medicare, slashing spending on higher education, slashing spending from infrastructure and, in addition, consigning the Australian economy to a deeper, longer recession with thousands more Australians unemployed.

The Liberal Party, it seems, views the federal budget as a theoretical accounting exercise when in fact the budget is about responsibly managing the finances of our community. It is about responding to the macroeconomic conditions that Australia now faces and responding in a responsible manner. Running a cyclical budget deficit at a time of grave economic crisis is the only responsible course of action. If we listened to those opposite, the pension would not be being increased to provide justice for our pensioners. The Liberals would not be investing in infrastructure to build the economic capacity of Australia and prepare us for future prosperity. The Liberals would not be investing in education to give all primary schools in our community better facilities for teaching and learning.

It is worth restating the pension reforms that are in this budget. The Rudd government is providing a significant increase of $32.49 for full-rate single age disability and carer pensioners and providing assistance for couple pensioners with a $10.14 increase for full-rate couples combined. These increases are of great significance to all of the pensioners living in my electorate, and they have been a welcome measure in this budget. Other pension reform includes increasing the retirement age from 65 to 67 over a staged introduction coming into full effect in 2023, which is an essential measure to achieve a sustainable pension system. People I have spoken to in my electorate understand that, with a longer-living and fitter population and a declining number of people earning and providing support through the taxation system to support that ageing population, some change was essential. It is change that is taking place across all developed economies.
and it is an appropriate decision. As I mentioned earlier, it has a staged introduction in order to give those who are affected by this measure time to plan for their retirements.

On infrastructure, this budget shows that the Rudd government understands the need to invest in infrastructure to improve the productive capacity of our nation. According to the OECD Economic Outlook Interim Report released in March 2009, the composition of Australia’s fiscal response to this economic crisis has been heavily tilted in favour of investment spending and it makes the point that it is to a much greater degree than in any other OECD country. Under this budget, the government will deliver further infrastructure spending to protect jobs now and to build our economy for the future. There are measures for metropolitan rail networks, including $4.6 billion for more efficient metropolitan rail networks, and that will of course deliver significant economic and social benefits through less road congestion, lower greenhouse gas emissions and faster travel times for commuters. There is $3.4 billion in this budget for the Network 1 road freight corridor linking Melbourne and Cairns and $389 million for port infrastructure to improve access to global markets for our export industries. Each of these projects will, at a national level, reduce economic inefficiencies caused by the failure of the former government to invest adequately in the infrastructure platforms that this country needs to build our future prosperity.

There has already been a great deal of infrastructure spending that has had a direct impact in my electorate. I mention first that, under the Building the Education Revolution program, schools in my electorate have already received almost $22 million, and more is to come. I know that the members opposite were opposed to this program, but I know equally well that students in my electorate will benefit enormously from the improvements to the schools in which they are taught. Under the Regional and Local Government Infrastructure program, which is infrastructure spending that has been delivered through local government bodies in my electorate, there has already been a range of projects announced, all of which will contribute to very useful projects within my electorate. This includes $1.4 million that was given to the City of Greater Dandenong, which has already announced a very substantial program to upgrade the Tatterson Park recreation area in Keysborough; $1.2 million given to the City of Frankston, which is going to be used for the Ballam Park recycled water project to drought-proof three local sporting reserves and, incidentally, save 47 million litres of drinking water each year that is presently used on sporting reserves; and $489,000 received by the other municipality in my electorate, the City of Kingston, which will be used for an upgrade of the Moorabbin Bowling Club and a number of other very useful local projects.

More recently, at the start of May, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government announced a very large project: the complete rebuilding and upgrading of the Noble Park Memorial Swim Centre at a cost of some $7.27 million. This facility is located in the federal electorate of Bruce but serves the entire community of Noble Park and, indeed, the whole community of the city of Greater Dandenong. The member for Bruce, who I see is in the chamber, and I were very pleased to announce that $7.27 million grant recently. There is also a $2.97 million grant to the City of Kingston in yet another piece of infrastructure spending. The City of Kingston is going to use that money to upgrade the Kingston Heath regional soccer facility, which is a much used and much loved local facility that provides soccer grounds. The upgrade will include the construction of bet-
ter seating facilities for those attending games at that Kingston Heath regional soccer facility.

Further on local infrastructure—all of which is going to lead to people throughout my electorate and the whole of the south-east of Melbourne as well as many other parts of the country seeing construction commencing on useful projects—last week I was able to join the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, in announcing social housing projects in my electorate, which will see the upgrade of homes in Chelsea Heights, Aspendale, Dandenong and Noble Park at a cost of over $200,000. This will not merely improve the standard of the social housing that is the subject of the spending but also create local jobs. Again, the member for Bruce, the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, was present with me at the announcement made by the Minister for Housing in relation to social housing projects in Dandenong in his electorate of Bruce. Construction firms told us at the places I visited with the Minister for Housing last week that they were going to be putting on extra staff to undertake the kinds of works that are involved in these social housing projects.

To return to the appropriations bills and to look at the specific budget measures, another infrastructure project of direct relevance to south-east Melbourne and to my electorate is the Dandenong intermodal terminal. This budget includes some $50 million for the Altona-Laverton precinct and the Dandenong intermodal terminal. These projects will improve rail connectivity, provide intermodal terminals and generally expand the capacity of transport networks in Melbourne to handle freight, which of course is wholly appropriate for the high level of manufacturing activity that takes place within metropolitan Melbourne and uses the facilities of the port of Melbourne.

This budget is about priorities. One of the priorities that is clearly spelled out in this budget is the need for Australia to shift to a low-carbon economy. That shift is something that the Rudd Labor government understands. It is a shift which will involve helping to build an economy with green jobs so that the future is one of low carbon and one in which carbon pollution, which is the underlying cause of the dangerous climate change that the world faces, will be reduced. There is within this budget a $2 billion program which is directed at demonstration projects for carbon capture and storage and clean coal. The significance of such projects to Australia is obvious: developing industrial-scale demonstration projects for carbon capture and storage technology in Australia will make possible the continued use of coal, not only in Australia but also in industries and in power generation throughout the world. Putting money into carbon capture and storage shows that Australia is doing its part in the development of this technology, which is one of many measures that this government is committed to in confronting the challenge presented by climate change.

Another measure that is important in this budget, in the same area, is the commitment of $1.5 billion for renewable energy for up to four large-scale solar energy generation projects. A further related measure is $465 million to establish Renewables Australia, an independent body set up to support leading edge renewable technology research. The two initiatives I have just mentioned—that is, the $1.5 billion for the large-scale electricity generation projects and the $465 million to establish Renewables Australia—are initiatives that will help ensure that 20 per cent of Australia’s electricity supply comes from renewable energy by 2020. As with the investment in research on carbon capture and storage, investment in these renewable sources of energy is a key part of any re-
response to climate change. These initiatives, in turn, build on the already announced Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the Renewable Energy Fund of $500 million and solar and clean energy research, as well as $500 million for the Solar Cities, National Solar Schools, and Green Precincts Fund initiatives. I commend the legislation to the House.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (5.22 pm)—I would like to report to the House that in my electorate I am picking up very deep concerns about the deficit and the debt that has been forced upon our country. People are wondering, ‘Has the government lost its way?’ People are wondering, ‘Does the government have a plan for how to deal with this debt and deficit?’

In question time today we saw some obfuscation, which would indicate that perhaps the government does not have a plan. The country looks like it is going to be in debt and deficit for decades to come. Of course, we will all be paying the interest on that, let alone trying to pay off the principal. That is going to be very difficult, not only for the current generation but also for our kids and grandkids, and I worry for them.

I have lived through a period during which our country was debt free. We were the envy of the world. Yes, people will say, ‘Well, there has been a global financial crisis.’ But other countries have approached this quite differently to the way that Australia has approached it. The policy choices that are available to governments are interesting, and it is interesting to look at the policy choices that the Australian government has adopted. Basically, this has been: borrow, borrow, borrow—if you want to hand out money, just borrow and hand it out. That has been very sad. I think that the Australian community has picked up that the two cash splashes that we saw have not been effective, and they are wondering why we borrowed the money just to hand it out to no effect.

The opposition, for its part, has also been articulating a policy by which, we believe, we could have got twice the bang for the buck for half the money. That is an example of policy choices that are available to governments, and it is a pity that we put our country so far into debt when it really was not necessary.

Specifically in relation to the budget, there has been a lot of talk by the government about infrastructure—nation building and so on. We have seen the parade of hard hats and fluorescent vests all over the country in the last week. People are being asked to believe that a lot of money is being spent on infrastructure. What they are not being told is the quantum of money—how it compares to the previous government, when it might be spent and how it might be funded.

In North Queensland, despite indicating otherwise, the Rudd government will spend less in 2009-10—that is, the next financial year—on road and rail infrastructure than the coalition committed when we were in government. The Rudd government will actually spend less on infrastructure in North Queensland. That is not what the government and their hard hats are telling us, but that is the reality of it. Projects like the Abbot Point coal terminal upgrade and the Townsville to Mount Isa rail corridor are stalled indefinitely—the absolutely nation-building projects in North Queensland are stalled indefinitely.

If the member for Kennedy was here, he would be saying, in a very loud voice, ‘Hear, hear!’ The North West Queensland Minerals Province, which he represents in this parliament, is a wealth creator beyond imagination—it has that potential. It is still largest prospective minerals province in the world today, but the rail and road corridors, which
were identified by the former government under AusLink, have not received any funding. Trains have got to travel at 40 kilometres an hour in some cases—there are not enough passing loops. The rail itself needs replacing with heavier duty rail, but there is no money. It is a project that could begin more or less immediately. It is the same with the upgrade of the Abbot Point coal terminal, but where is the missing link between the coal fields and Abbot Point? There is no funding. It is such a shame.

In relation to the Bruce Highway, we find that the passing lanes that we so desperately need every five kilometres have just been forgotten about. This budget has been a bad outcome for North Queensland. Any North Queenslander who thinks that these infrastructure projects are going to have any sort of effect in North Queensland has got another think coming. It is such a shame that it is being put about that there is all this money when in fact there is not.

I am pleased that the member for Goldstein is with us tonight, because he has recognised the $60 billion black hole in the infrastructure packages. This surfaced just the other day. It is basically causing a raid on our superannuation funds. Less than 22 per cent of the new infrastructure spending will occur either in this financial year or in the next. The majority of it is going to have to be funded out of private sources, not out of government sources. The superannuation funds are paranoid about what the government might impose upon them and about what they might be required to do, because their obligation to those who deposit money in their superannuation fund is to get the best return, and sometimes public infrastructure does not deliver the best return. That is going to be a very significant issue, and we may well see that some of the projects that the government has announced will in fact never happen.

Some in the media and elsewhere would unkindly call that ‘government spin’, but perhaps it is not so unkind after all; perhaps it is something we as the Australian community should all face up to and understand that we are being sold a pup. Certainly, for my part, I am convinced that that is the case.

We looked at the cash splashes that occurred—one just before Christmas and one in April. There is no doubt that those around the world who know about these things basically cannot believe what they are seeing. Recently, I was speaking to a number of finance ministers in other countries, and they could not believe it when I told them that Australia’s response to the global financial crisis was to borrow money, hand it out and say, ‘Just go and spend it.’ Their instant reaction—in a non-political way, because they are remote from Australia—was: ‘Well, that won’t produce a stimulus at all. It will produce happy voters, but it won’t produce a stimulus.’ That is what has happened.

I will tell you what they did in Malta, and this applies particularly in my electorate. They immediately identified large employers in their country who may face difficulty in keeping their employees during the downturn in the global economy. Malta decided to support those particular industries to keep people in jobs and give them and their families security, but they did it for a very good reason: they believe that those companies will come out of this crisis in a far stronger position than they were in going into it. So there is a win for everybody—a win for the employees, a win for the company and a win for the country—but the key is to support those particular threatened companies so they can continue their operations.

I turn to my electorate and look at Yabulu, BHP Billiton’s nickel refinery. Our community has been very concerned. Currently BHP have a high-level committee looking at the
future of the refinery. They are looking at options that range from closing the refinery completely or upgrading the refinery through to processing even more ore through the refinery. All options are on the table. But the financial press is beginning to write very concerning articles, saying: Yabulu is next on the hit list of BHP Billiton. I do not know whether that is true, because BHP have not made a statement, but, when you look at the world nickel price and the fact that BHP's plant continues to trade at a loss, the future is not very bright. BHP have shut down the Ravensthorpe nickel mine and processing plant, which was feeding part-processed material to Yabulu for final processing. They shut it down, so that feed is no longer there. BHP are now basically processing dirt containing nickel that comes from places like New Caledonia, the Philippines or Indonesia. In fact, just as an aside, they are the largest importer of water in Australia because the dirt that comes in is 35 per cent moisture. That cannot continue. Yabulu has to be profitable. It has to have a good outlook. It is an old plant; it has been there for decades. The worry is that it will close.

As the largest employer in the city of Townsville, if the plant closes it will have a devastating effect on our economy. Nearly 2,000 people are likely to lose their jobs. The money circulating in the economy will dry up. We have to be on guard about that. This is my point: this is a prime example of where the Malta philosophy would have worked, where the government could have gone to BHP and said, 'Look, in this downturn we will give you whatever assistance is needed to ensure that your plant continues to operate and people continue to be employed.' I call on the government to look at the options in relation to keeping major employers afloat and providing some certainty for families in places like Townsville, where so many people are threatened with the loss of their jobs.

On another matter, there are changes to youth allowance. That was canvassed today in question time. I do not think the government quite understand what they have done. I would like to read an email that I received during question time today while the minister was talking about this matter. This is an email from a person in Loxton, in South Australia, but it is typical of emails we are all receiving. It says:

The changes to qualification for youth allowance post 1 January 2010, as outlined in the federal budget, will be extremely damaging to country students. Currently a student under the age of 25 is considered independent of the parental income test if they have worked full time for 18 months since leaving school or worked part time for two years since leaving school or have earned $19,532. In the latest federal budget it is proposed that students, unless qualified by 1 January 2010, will no longer qualify as independent unless they have worked 30 hours a week for 18 months since leaving school or worked part time for two years since leaving school or have earned $19,532. In the latest federal budget it is proposed that students, unless qualified by 1 January 2010, will no longer qualify as independent unless they have worked 30 hours a week for 18 months in a two-year period. The vast majority of country students will struggle to meet these new guidelines as full-time work is difficult to find.

I have James Cook University in my electorate, as has the member for Leichhardt, who is with us. We know how many students come from outlying regions. They will be affected. The email goes on to say:

The relocation assistance proposed ONLY APPLIES TO THOSE WHO QUALIFY FOR YOUTH ALLOWANCE. It is a double slap in the face.

However, there is a group of students that are even more disadvantaged than students completing secondary schooling at the end of 2009 and beyond who will be operating under the new qualification criteria. These are young people who have taken a gap year and are already six months into their 18-month program to earn $19,532—the current rules. They’ve had the rug pulled out from underneath them by having the rules changed on them midway. This group of students finished secondary school in November 2008 and would have been planning to start uni in 2010. What do they do now? What hope have they got...
to catch up the 30-hour a week average criteria with only 12 months left of their qualifying period remaining?

This is the difficulty that the government face in what they have done to students. They may be unintended consequences. If they are, then we have to see the government immediately moving the necessary amendments to have some kind of transitional arrangement put in place.

I turn now to the question of the reduction in the rebate for cataract surgery. This is a monumental mistake, and it is not being overly dramatic to say the government has decided to send some people blind. It has been the current government’s mantra to entrench the notion of a fair society. Certainly, the Prime Minister has said, ‘There is no greater touchstone for the whole debate about fairness than health and hospitals.’ Mr Prime Minister, please revisit this particular issue and understand what it means. Do you know that a cosmetic hair transplant will get a doctor a higher Medicare rebate than cataract surgery? How can that be? Where has the importance gone? Where have the priorities gone? Dr Bill Glasson, a respected surgeon, who takes his cataract surgery to regional and rural areas, said that he believes hundreds of people suffering cataract problems in rural and remote parts of the state could go blind following the federal government’s decision to cut Medicare rebates for surgery. Bill Glasson is not the kind of person who would over dramatise the situation. We have got to take notice of him and his colleagues in relation to what is what.

The rationale for doing this was that these days the procedure is much shorter and, therefore, it should be cheaper. This is false. If you visit any ophthalmologist you can immediately understand why it is false. I visited Dr Bill Talbot in his rooms in Townsville last week. He has a staff of 11 and 1½ doctors. He works from half past seven in the morning until half past seven at night. He does not get a break. He is a visiting medical officer. He does what he thinks he should do. He visits Palm Island to look after Indigenous Australians. He is a dedicated surgeon. He is not in it for the money. But, at the end of the day, he has to turn a profit to continue to provide the services that he provides to needy Australians. Cutting the rebate will make his business unprofitable. What does that mean? Staff will be sacked. Services will be reduced. He will not be able to be a VMO anymore at the Townsville Hospital. The public waiting lists will grow longer. What kind of an outcome is that? The government has got to revisit this.

Let us look at the impact on the patients. This measure will in fact undermine further the public confidence in Australia’s Medicare system. Patients without private health insurance undertaking cataract surgery in the private system will have to pay increased out-of-pocket expenses. People with private health insurance will have to pay increased out-of-pocket expenses. The cataract procedures will not be available anymore in rural and remote settings or in Indigenous communities—and they are the most vulnerable. There will be greater congestion in an already stretched public hospital system. There will be longer waiting lists. Think about this as an unintended consequence: for elderly Australians who cannot get a cataract operation, there will be a greater risk of falls and hip fractures as a result of poor vision. There will be greater risk of confusion and depression as a consequence of poor vision. There will be people living in fear of blindness. What kind of government does that to the people of Australia? It is not a compassionate government. It is not a government that cares about our health system. It is a government that must revisit this particular issue for the sake of all of those hundreds of thousands of Australians each year who have cataract op-
Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (5.42 pm)—I rise to support the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and cognate bills and to support this budget. It is a budget framed to support jobs to build a nation so that we are well placed for recovery. This is the third phase of the government’s ongoing stimulus and nation-building plan to support jobs in the local economy.

I was out on the weekend in Redlynch, in my community, running a mobile office, meeting with members of the community out there and talking to small business people, mums and dads and workers. I met with one small business man who expressed to me the real struggle that he is finding in his business today. We are in the midst of a global recession. It has swept across the world and it has swept across Australia. It is impacting businesses in Cairns and workers in Cairns. We as a government have responded to that. This businessman welcomed the government’s initiative late last year—the stimulus package—and our Nation Building and Jobs Plan. Seventy per cent of our investment in stimulus is in infrastructure. But, as a small business man, he also particularly noted how important the $900 payments have been for his small business. They enabled him to keep people employed. He is in the hospitality industry. The payments have been a very important part of our Nation Building and Jobs Plan. Similarly, I spoke to a mother with a son who had been laid off by CMC, a construction company that has recently gone into administration. He subsequently got a job with Smithfield Electrics—he is a third-year apprentice—but, unfortunately, they were impacted by the CMC administration, and he subsequently lost his job with Smithfield Electrics.

They are just two examples: a small business owner and another individual that I met on the weekend. The talk is all about the economy and all about jobs. What they have been looking for and what they appreciate from government is a preparedness to act. They want a government that is prepared to take the necessary action in these difficult economic times to support business and to support jobs in local communities. That is the way in which this budget has been framed. This budget builds upon our Economic Security Strategy from late last year and our Nation Building and Jobs Plan; this budget is building infrastructure to support recovery as it comes.

I would like to spend a bit of time on the economic outlook. We are in the deepest recession since the Great Depression. The world economy is forecast to contract by 1½ per cent in 2009. The economies of our major trading partners are expected to contract by two per cent, which is a worse outcome than that experienced during the Asian financial crisis. The economies of eight of our top 10 trading partners are expected to contract in 2009, and advanced economies in deep recession are expected to contract by 3¾ per cent in 2009. So all around the world the economies that we are linked to are in recession and struggling. Our major trading partners are struggling. It is no wonder that businesses in Cairns dependent on the tourism industry and the construction industry are being impacted. Small business owners are having their profits stripped away and workers are losing their jobs through no fault of their own. The Rudd government made a decision that it would act, and that is what this budget continues to do.

When we look at the forward estimates, we can see that unemployment is of particu-
lar concern. Unemployment is expected to peak at 8½ per cent in 2012-13, and it is increasing at the moment. In my electorate of Leichhardt, according to the March quarter analysis, unemployment is already at 10.7 per cent. So unemployment is already a significant problem, and it is expected to increase. It is expected to be 8¼ per cent in 2009-10, 8½ per cent in 2010-11, 7½ per cent in 2011-12 and 8½ per cent in 2012-13. That is according to the projections in the budget. So, going forward, we have a major challenge with unemployment. The government have recognised that and that is why we have acted responsibly.

It is also expected that GDP will contract by one-half of one per cent next year before recovering to grow by 2¼ per cent in 2010-11, by 4½ per cent by 2011-12 and 4½ per cent by 2012-13. We are going into a period where the economy is contracting and where the global recession is impacting upon us directly, but we forecast that we will come out in 2010-11 with a growth of 2¼ per cent and 4½ per cent in 2011-12. The opposition have questioned some of this growth forecast. They have been out in the media, questioning the Treasury estimates and claiming that these figures are optimistic. Really, they have been undermining them and suggesting that they are not true. The reality is that these estimates are similar to those for the recession that we came out of in the 1990s and similar to the figures for the recession in the 1980s. There were similar growth forecasts when we came out of those recessions, and we are in a very similar situation with our current forecasts. So we have confidence in those forecasts and we believe they are the best estimates at the moment, and they were provided by Treasury.

Going forward one of the major challenges we face is the decline in our terms of trade. In 2009 we have seen our terms of trade drop by 13 per cent, ripping $35 billion from our economy, from the income of this country. We hear the opposition talking a lot about debt and deficit and suggesting that the Rudd government has basically run the economy into deficit because of irresponsible spending. The reality is that the vast majority of the deficit going forward is due to the decline in our terms of trade, decline in our tax revenue, decline in capital gains tax and decline in company taxes. We are losing large amounts of revenue from our economy and that is directly feeding into the deficit. We made a decision to stimulate the economy through our Nation Building and Jobs Plan, through our stimulus package and through these budget measures. We have also seen our revenues disappear because of the decline in our terms of trade. According to our estimate, we expect to lose $210 billion in revenue. That is an enormous amount of money. It is no wonder that we are in deficit this year and why it is projected that we will be in deficit in the future. It is critical that we also invest in order to support jobs in the economy. We face $210 billion in revenue losses, but we made a decision to stimulate the economy. That was and is the right thing to do.

Moving forward we need to ensure that we have a plan to bring the nation out of deficit and to return the budget to surplus. That is why we have clearly outlined an exit strategy from this deficit. As growth returns to normal—as we have said, growth will decline by about one-half of one per cent next year, by 2¼ per cent the following year and by 4½ per cent the year after that—tax revenues will increase. That will allow revenue to recover and we will see the budget return to normal in terms of income.

We have also made a commitment to keep real growth in spending to two per cent. So we are being fiscally responsible and will hold spending to two per cent. We have made a commitment that any new spending during
this period will be replaced by savings. So we do have a plan to return the budget to surplus over a period of time, and we expect to be back in surplus by 2015-16.

The major issues in terms of the deficit are not due to irresponsible spending, as the opposition suggests. They are due to the fact that we have lost a significant amount of revenue, $210 billion, going forward. We have made a very important decision to stimulate jobs in the economy and within our local communities.

In my own electorate of Leichhardt we have seen significant investments as part of our Nation Building and Jobs Plan—our stimulus measures in this budget. We have the Bruce Highway in the southern part of Cairns significantly in need of an upgrade. In the 2009-10 budget we have a commitment of another $5.5 million that builds on the $5 million brought forward in the last budget. This is to do planning and to bring forward a project of $150 million to upgrade and tackle congestion problems in the southern suburbs of Cairns. We have got a commitment of over $15 million towards the Peninsula Development Road to continue sealing this road. It is a very important access road to Cape York Peninsula not only to ensure that people can get in and out but also so that the economy can grow up there. Cattle can come out and tourists can go in, and we can continue to build that community.

Remote community access roads on the cape will also receive another $2 million in funding in 2009-10 to upgrade roads into Aboriginal communities—that sort of work. We have a total Australian government contribution of $10.5 million going forward, with expected completion dates in 2011. The Roads to Recovery program has delivered 15 grants of $4.9 million to local councils. We have the Black Spot Program—five local projects worth $1.385 million. It is fantastic to see some roundabouts upgraded on the northern approaches to Cairns. The Smithfield roundabout will be upgraded on the Captain Cook Highway. We are also seeing work done around Portsmith, Mossman and Mount Molloy Road, Rumula. These are all important works that need to be done. Sadly, we saw a cyclist killed on one of those roundabouts in recent times. This project, this commitment for additional funding through the Black Spot Program, is desperately needed in that local community to upgrade that roundabout. We have seen boom gates provided on five local projects: Aumuller Road, Cairns; Thomson Road, Edmonton; Coombe Street, Cairns; Anderson Road, Woree; and Minnie Street, Cairns. We have seen a number of accidents in the tropical north on railway crossings. People need to drive more effectively and more responsibly, but the commitments to upgrade rail crossings are welcome and they are much needed, particularly in my region.

The Community Infrastructure Program is particularly important as well. We have seen 16 projects worth $3.5 million, projects across my electorate that are supporting jobs and are providing people with jobs in the construction industry, which is hard hit at the moment. There is also support across a range of other areas, including health. The National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program is delivering $131,000. Cairns Private Hospital will be able to refurbish and establish an intervention cardiology service and an intensive care unit within the hospital. The current situation is that you are really in trouble if you have a heart attack in Cairns, because you have got to get to Townsville. This investment is going to support the private hospital being able to do work that it was not able to do before, reinstituting an intensive care facility and enabling it to start to give people much better health services, particularly those facing heart disease.
Other health initiatives that are particularly important include the funding for our $5 million GP superclinic. It was great to have the health minister in my electorate last week to announce the successful tenderer for the GP superclinic in Edmonton. It is a hub and spoke model; it will have links not only through to the centre of town but also through to Smithfield. Balance! have been the successful tenderer and I look forward to their continuing work in building relationships with other health providers in Cairns and also constructing that facility down at Edmonton. Not only will it improve health in Cairns; it will also provide jobs in the construction industry going forward. We have had a range of other health commitments, including new MRIs, in recent times and the oncology services are to be improved at the Cairns Base Hospital. A great commitment in the budget is the $9.2 million over four years for expansion of health services in the Torres Strait Islands, particularly an upgrade in the Saibai Island clinic, and $2.9 million over four years for a mosquito control program. Health is particularly important in the Torres Straits and in Cape York, where we have a lot of Indigenous people who, as we know, have a significant gap in life expectancy. We need to do more to support health and deliver health services in those areas. These are welcome announcements and commitments in the budget.

The area that is really getting the most discussion and is particularly welcomed in my electorate of Leichhardt is the effort that we are going to as part of our Nation Building and Jobs Plan to support primary schools for the 21st century—our National School Pride Program—which supports further construction of education infrastructure in Cairns, as we are all across the country. It does two things. It creates jobs today. In the last month or so I have announced $34 million in the first round for 15 primary schools to build libraries or multipurpose centres across my electorate, and also $8.9 million for 66 schools to do small refurbishments, maintenance and some small construction work in schools, which again not only supports the critical maintenance of schools but also supports the jobs in those local communities.

Our education program, as part of our Nation Building and Jobs Plan, is critically important, particularly nowadays, to support jobs. As I said, I met with a young bloke—a young apprentice who had lost his job twice—and his mother on the weekend. I know there are many others. CMC went into administration in the last few days. They effectively had 500 people working for them. In the construction industry, people have lost their jobs and are looking for work in other areas, and the education funding is providing real work and real support for jobs in local communities like Cairns.

Our Community Infrastructure Program is supporting jobs in Cairns. We had a commitment of $2 million to build a new emergency services centre, which is critically important infrastructure. Cairns is at the far end of this country. We suffer from cyclones—not irregularly—and this new facility will enable us to better plan and coordinate and better respond to cyclones when they come along. So we have a budget and we have a plan that is very focused on ensuring that this country can weather the global recession and can ensure that, as we move forward, we are well placed for recovery. What we are doing is investing in nation-building infrastructure to support jobs today but also to ensure that we are well placed for the recovery that will come in the future.

There is a significant difference between this side of the House and the other side of the House. We have been prepared to act in the face of the global recession. We have
been prepared to take the difficult decision to stimulate the economy. Sometimes this has been unpopular, but it is critically important to support jobs in local communities like mine in Cairns. That is a decision we have taken. We heard the member for Herbert a little while ago putting forward some ideas from Malta and other places. Those are really the first ideas in terms of fiscal policy that I have heard from the opposition. They have been going on about debt and deficit but have really put forward no clear plans about how they would deal with the global recession. They have been running a scare campaign.

We have clear plans for the future. They are in the budget. They are in the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. They are in the economic security package that we announced last year. We are getting on with the job of tackling the global recession, supporting jobs and building the nation. Seventy per cent of our stimulus is nation-building infrastructure, economic infrastructure and community infrastructure. That will support jobs today and also ensure we are well placed for the recovery.

I commend this budget to the House. I am out there selling it in my community. It has been welcomed. People appreciate the fact that the Rudd government is not prepared to sit on its hands—it is prepared to take the decisive action needed to support jobs in local communities like mine. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (6.01 pm)—As always, I am pleased to speak in the House of Representatives, this great chamber of democracy, and represent the people I have the great privilege of interacting with in the suburbs of Moggill, Bellbowrie, Jindalee, Westlake, Middle Park and across the river in Taringa and Indooroopilly. They are hard-working Australians who want of their government genuine fiscal prudence, good ideas and good policies. I know they are very disappointed with the second Rudd budget, delivered by the Treasurer earlier this month. They are very disappointed because it is a Labor budget through and through. It is a Labor budget through and through because it is irresponsible and takes this country into territory that means their children will be saddled with great debt and there will be a great deficit in this country.

My Queensland colleague the Labor member for Leichhardt said that coalition members will go on about debt and deficit. I can assure him that I will certainly do that, and I know my colleagues will continue to do that, because we know how significant it is to ensure that the national budget, just like a household budget or a business budget, is kept within a certain framework. You cannot have a situation where the government of the day just spends willy-nilly, recklessly and irresponsibly, and takes the country into very dangerous waters when there is no ability down the track to service that debt.

This budget was supposed to be a tough budget. Of course, in the week leading up to the budget, senior members of the Rudd government tried to give to the Australian people the impression that they were going to be tough, that it was going to be a horror budget and that they would make sure that no area of Commonwealth expenditure was untouched. Why were they going to do that? Because they themselves realised that the earlier cash splash and the earlier investment of hard taxpayer dollars into things like Pink Batts were really not delivering the returns that they should have. They were being very political in trying to keep the economy out of recession. Of course, we are now in the third quarter of a recession—and they failed miserably to prevent that. A lot of taxpayers’ money has gone down the drain. Regrettably, the children of the people I represent will be
paying for that very heavily in the months, years and, indeed, decades ahead.

This budget is also one of broken promises. It is short-sighted. It does not deliver what the people of Australia, certainly the people of the electorate of Ryan, expect from the national government. In short, it is a very weak budget. It was delivered by a Treasurer who is clearly out of his depth. I regret to say again that tens of thousands of families across this great country will be paying for it. They might not think they will be paying for it as I speak but certainly there will come a time when they realise that the credit card can no longer be maxed out.

I want to draw the attention of the parliament and of the people of Ryan to the $188 billion figure. They will hear a lot about this. This is the figure that the government refuses to talk about. This is the record net debt that is going to be a chain around this country in a few short years. I also want to draw the attention of the House and of the constituents of Ryan to the $58 billion deficit figure. It is remarkable that when the Treasurer delivered the national budget he could not bring himself to mention that. When we are talking about those kinds of dollars one would expect the Treasurer to be able to eloquently articulate the actual amount of money that this country is in debt for. I repeat it again: it is $58 billion.

Interestingly, the government seems to be satisfied that the unemployment rate is a single-digit figure—8½ per cent. I think that is atrocious. How can we be content to say that the unemployment rate is only in single digits? Of course, we on this side of the chamber all know that when we came into government there were one million people unemployed. That was the legacy of the Keating recession we had to have. Interestingly, here we are with a Labor Prime Minister and a Labor Treasurer in a recession. That is very interesting indeed.

The other point that I want to draw very strongly on in my remarks is the issue of private health insurance rebates. In the Ryan electorate, a lot of people have taken up private health insurance. They are doing their bit to ensure that others who might not have the financial means have the opportunity of accessing our public health system. They have chosen to take out private health insurance with the 30 per cent rebate that the previous Howard government invested in as a very strong public policy signal. Yet in the budget just delivered the Rudd government have signalled that they are going to attack this. What that is going to mean is that every day Australians—the working families that Labor allegedly represents—are going to pay a high price.

The superannuation co-contribution scheme was a very significant scheme. The previous government and the Treasurer were very creative and innovative in that policy area. That scheme was clearly designed to bolster the retirement savings of low- and middle-income earners. This has been cut by a third. That is appalling. At a time when we have an ageing population and we are trying to encourage as many Australians as possible to save for their future, it was the public policy view of the previous government, and remains so, that we should be doing all we can to encourage people to put away extra dollars. The government’s co-contribution scheme was very popular. It was a very positive signal. Yet the Rudd Labor government has savaged this by a third.

Australians are going to be working longer to pay off Labor’s debt. We all know that the pension age is being pushed out to 67. We see in recent media reports that this is something that a lot of Australians are not going to put up with. It just shows that La-
bor’s debt is something that is going to be affecting all kinds of Australians in all kinds of ways for many years to come.

Essentially, with a Labor government, a Labor Prime Minister and a Labor Treasurer, Labor’s reckless economic management is going to hurt not only this country as a whole but individual Australians. It is going to hurt retired people, families, businesses and vulnerable and exposed people—those who Labor says are really its core constituency. It is going to hurt the very people who Labor says that it represents; it is going to hurt the very people who Labor says are its natural followers. I say to those across the length and breadth of this country that Labor is not your friend at all. How can Labor be your friend when it is taking the country into great debt and great deficit?

Just like a business debt or a household debt, that has to be repaid. At some point in time, in some way, the children of Australia today are going to pay that price. Those who are in their 50s now will be paying the price later on, because the capacity of the Australian government in the future to maintain a certain lifestyle for them will be much diminished. The government will simply not have the money in the bank; it will not have the financial resources in its kitty to maintain the lifestyle that we experience today and that we expect be delivered to people who throughout their working life have paid their taxes and done the right thing and who in their retirement want to maybe do a little bit of community work but also want a standard of living that gives them dignity in their old age. But, as I said, there will come a time when the government of the day, whether it is a coalition government or indeed a Labor government, will be confronted with this incredible debt, which will be an imposition on its finances that it will have to repay.

Do not think for a moment that anyone is divorced from the national government in terms of the country’s financial responsibilities. Mr and Mrs Australia, you are affected by what the Prime Minister of this country does. With this Labor Prime Minister, clearly all the signs are that you will be affected in a more detrimental way. If you own and run businesses, those businesses will be detrimentally affected. That is something that I will turn to in a moment.

At the end of the day, governments do not create wealth; bureaucrats do not create wealth. That is perhaps the fundamental distinction between this side of the chamber and those opposite. We on this side of the chamber—we of the Liberal and National political stripe—strongly hold the view that it is business, small, medium and large, that creates wealth. Entrepreneurs and innovators create wealth; those who are willing to put their own capital on the line create wealth; those who are willing to come together to join their talent and initiative and to combine their resources and networks create wealth. They are the ones who ought to receive the gratitude of the Australian people. They are the ones who create wealth and jobs. When students come out of school, they look to entrepreneurs and business men and women to provide them jobs. That is something that the policy compass should always be focused on. I encourage the leadership of the federal opposition and all colleagues on this side to keep that as the anchor—as the rock—for how we represent our people.

I come from a small business background in the sense that my parents owned a little corner shop. They were not fancy people. They were regular people, Mr and Mrs Average. The resources that they were able to put together to put me through law school and my brother and sister through medical school reflect that philosophy. They were ordinary people who worked their backsides off, paid
their taxes and did their community service and who wanted to be left alone. They worked on their own initiative and contributed to the fabric of this country.

I am very proud of my parents. Indeed, they are my heroes. They and people like them are the spine of this country. People like them across the country collectively sacrifice so much and contribute so much to the future of this country. I will continue to remind my colleagues—indeed, I hope, sometime very soon, a future Liberal Prime Minister—that they are the heart and soul of our support base and they are the kinds of people we must in every fashion look after. They are the ones who create opportunities for the rest of the country. We must always remember that.

I want to humanise this presentation by making reference to a young constituent from the Ryan electorate who has very kindly not only given me her permission but indeed encouraged me to quote her name. I want to thank you, Melissa Rowan, from the Ryan electorate. She wrote to me. She is 19 years old and she asked me to use her words in whatever form I could to reflect the thinking of a lot of young people. It is very instructive. This will be of great interest to other young people in the Ryan electorate and, I know, the many others in the Ryan electorate that I represent. In an email to me on 27 April she wrote:

Dear Mr Johnson,

I am writing this letter to voice my complaint about Kevin Rudd’s Stimulus Package.

My name is Melissa Rowan and I am 19 years old from Brisbane …

I find this highly offensive—she is talking about the stimulus package—just because I earn under the threshold that I am not entitled to this payment. I am now working fulltime and have been for 12 months. I am a taxpayer and I pay tax so people on Centerlink benefits can get money. Pensioners and Centerlink members got $1400 at Christmas time … I paid my tax as a paye and I submitted my taxation group certificait which was assessed accordingly for the year …

I am also aware students who were working part time and studying who earn under the threshold are entitled to this payment but myself as a working person I am not …

I also find it very discriminatory that I will be paying for deceased persons to receive this payment, people to receive two lots of payments and people in jail. I do not believe I should be paying for a ‘pet’ to receive this stimulus package.

We all know that pets happened to receive hard-earned taxpayers’ money as well, of course.

I have heard of a third stimulus package and I am very against this.

I am a hard working Australian who only earns about $23000 a year and I am currently struggling to pay for braces which are $6580 and next year (2010) I will be needing a Jaw operation which will cost me $5000. I am paying for private health insurance for this operation and to top it all off I will be getting retrenched along with 80 other staff at my workplace …

I am deeply upset and affected by this …

Kevin Rudd is trying to win the vote of younger Australians. I just wanted to point out that there are young people like myself very unhappy with what the Rudd Government is doing.

This is just not right. People who have not received this money should not have to pay so millions of people can get a one off $900 bonus that we as taxpayers will be paying off for years to come. My Children one day will be paying for this. I am just very disappointed and uncomfortable about this.

I believe this Stimulus Package is a very big mistake and will put Australia into deep debt. John Howard worked so hard to clear debt and to save
money. Now Kevin Rudd is wasting billions of dollars that future generations will have to pay. It’s just not fair. This is an insult to tax payers and Kevin Rudd can not understand what most Australians are going through. He promised this would create jobs but this has not created jobs, if anything people have or will lose their jobs. This is dispicable what the Rudd Government is doing. This is nothing but a popularity contest to them.

I want to end my remarks, because regrettably time has escaped me. This is a young Australian—Melissa Rowan, who is 19 years old—from the Ryan electorate, who in those words expressed quite eloquently the increasing sentiment in this country that this is a government that is clearly out of its depth, that has no idea how to manage this economy, and that has clearly no capacity to distinguish between quality spending and wasteful spending.

We cannot simply throw money to try to artificially create jobs. What is needed is sustainable jobs. Just throwing money in the guise of a stimulus package to the extent that the government has spent that money is unsustainable. We need to support businesses and entrepreneurs because, as I said earlier, they are the ones that create jobs. You do not create them by throwing money so that a handful of companies can install pink batts in roofs. What happens after that? What happens after they have installed them? Do they come back to the government for more money so that they can go back and install more batts? This is the absurdity of it. This is the complete intellectual dishonesty and policy laziness of the Rudd Labor government. Just spending money is not a policy. Just playing Santa Claus is not a policy. You have got to do the hard yards.

We are not in the business of highlighting to the government what we are going to do at this time. We have already seen you copy 98 per cent of our tax policy at the last election. We will be ready for you. If you want to bring on an election, bring it on. If you think that the people of Ryan are not ready to show you what they think about the Rudd Labor government, bring on an election. I am campaigning hard. I am looking forward to the next election. I can assure you that I will be letting every single one of my constituents—the constituents that I have had the great pleasure of representing here since 2001—know that we cannot afford a Labor government anymore. We cannot for one day longer than is necessary afford to have a Labor government. (Time expired)

Ms CAMPBELL (Bass) (6.21 pm)—I rise today in an era of unprecedented global financial unrest, uncertainty and upheaval. We are in what is without question a most severe worldwide recession. It is against this backdrop that the federal government has framed a budget which will see emerge from this crisis a stronger and better nation. This is a nation-building budget. It is designed to support jobs, small business and pensioners. It unashamedly charts a course which will return the budget to surplus once this crisis has passed—and it will pass. In its wake there will be better schools, better roads, better community infrastructure and better hospitals. This is true across the country and it is true in the electorate of Bass.

One of the key initiatives of the Treasurer’s budget in Northern Tasmania is a funding injection which will see the Launceston General Hospital all but rebuilt. In the words of the hospital’s chief executive officer, John Kirwan, this investment will future-proof the hospital. Over three years, $40 million will be committed and invested to create an acute medical and surgical service unit at the Launceston General Hospital. Movement of patients between emergency services and acute care will be significantly improved. This funding will tackle deficiencies in current infrastructure by developing a medical assessment unit, redeveloping the
day procedures unit, expanding the operating suite and upgrading the intensive care unit and allied health services. It will assist with the hospital meeting safety and quality standards. It is a project which is the result of an outstanding submission made to the Rudd government’s nation-building Health and Hospitals Fund, a fund which is building the health infrastructure for the 21st century while at the same time creating employment opportunities.

What this means for the electorate of Bass and the wider community of Northern Tasmania cannot be overstated. The local economy will be stimulated and jobs will be created, and as the Launceston General Hospital approaches its 30th anniversary it will be better placed than ever before to meet the health needs of a growing community. I will take this opportunity to pay tribute to the dedicated staff at the Launceston General Hospital; their collective vision, foresight, passion and skill made the submission to the Health and Hospital Fund possible. Thirty-two projects were funded across the country out of the Health and Hospitals Fund, and I am proud to say that the Launceston General Hospital sits amongst those 32. John Kirwan is to be congratulated. So, too, are professors Berni Einoder and Rob Fassett and Dr Alasdair MacDonald, who have fought long and hard to create a hospital which will stand the test of time. This investment of $40 million over three years will encourage the retention of existing staff at the hospital. It will also make easier the recruitment of the high-calibre staff the community of Northern Tasmania deserves. It is without question a show of faith in the Launceston General Hospital.

This investment is complemented by a further $7.7 million which the Rudd government has committed for additional radiation oncology services at the Launceston General Hospital. This fulfils an election promise which I made to the people of Bass, and I thank the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, for her continued commitment to and interest in the health of our community. The Rudd government has also committed $1 million for patient accommodation services at the Holman Clinic and $500,000 which will be provided to the Division of General Practice, Northern Tasmania, for the Scottsdale Medical Centre. This funding will be used to build a new primary healthcare centre adjacent to the Scottsdale Regional Hospital.

The centre will provide both general practice and hospital medical services as well as access to allied health services. It will improve the nursing and administrative workforce as well as increase access to visiting medical specialists, pathology services and other services as needed by the community. The centre will replace the ageing and inadequate infrastructure that houses the current medical practice—infrastructure that has restricted practice growth and the recruitment and retention of the health professionals who support the development of team based health care. The centre will be completed to occupation stage within 14 months and will represent a significant boost to medical service sustainability across north-east Tasmania.

The 2009-2010 budget also delivers $134.4 million in a landmark package of measures to tackle shortages of doctors and health workers in rural and remote communities in Australia. The reform package introduces incentives based on the principle that the more remote you go, the greater the reward, to encourage doctors to work in some of Australia’s most isolated rural and remote communities. It will encourage doctors to go and work in rural and remote communities and will also help keep them there. The importance of this health package to the people of Northern Tasmania—indeed, to the entire
is immense. As a government, we are keeping our commitment to communities across Bass that we will support them, that we will respond to their needs and that we are securing the long-term health of the region. At the same time we are building the infrastructure of tomorrow and in the process providing much-needed jobs of today.

This is a responsible and responsive budget. It is a budget which responds to these unprecedented financial circumstances while at the same time taking some tough decisions—decisions which have been forced upon us by the reckless spending habits of the previous government. It has been said many times before that those opposite rode high on the boom provided by the mining industry and the growth of China. Those opposite believed they could fool the Australian people and simply buy their way to electoral success. Budget after budget was used to spend money they clearly believed would keep raining down on them. Fortunately for the former government, the Australian people spoke before they had to begin actually making the hard decisions. That has not stopped them from sitting back and attempting to fool the Australian people into believing they know all the answers, when in fact they have no plan and are completely out of touch with the needs of the economy.

Let us be perfectly blunt about this. Those opposite have no plan to deal with the global recession and are out of touch with the effect it is having on working families and their jobs. Around the world governments are taking action to stimulate their economies, but the opposition leader said that he is happy to let the market sort out the crisis. It is a recipe for disaster. It is that kind of attitude that has landed us in this situation. They have clearly learnt nothing. The opposition have no plan to support jobs and Liberal MPs still openly support bringing back Work Choices. Labor on the other hand has embarked on a program which, as I have said repeatedly in this House, will see the emergence of a stronger and infinitely better-resourced country.

In the Bass electorate, schools, hospitals and councils have benefited enormously from this. I have spoken at length about the hospital, but let us not forget what can only really be described as a mammoth investment in our education system, not only in Bass but across Tasmania and indeed the entire country. This budget builds on more than $7 million in funding through the National School Pride Program, which has seen 50 schools across the electorate of Bass receive up to $200,000. This, coupled with almost $16 million in the first round of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program, represents a redevelopment of schools in Northern Tasmania which is unprecedented. It will stimulate our economy, it will create employment and it will provide our young people with vastly improved learning spaces.

This budget supports the infrastructure spending committed to councils across the country, the impact of which has been enormous also. Northern Tasmanian councils have shared in more than $1.9 million as part of the Rudd government’s $300 million community infrastructure stimulus package, which is intended to help local communities respond to the global financial crisis. Dorset Council received $288,000, which contributed to projects such as an upgrade of the Legerwood Memorial Park and the reconstruction of the Ringarooma town hall roof. Flinders Council received $100,000, which allowed the council to contribute much-needed money towards infrastructure projects like the Yellow Beach foreshore redevelopment and the Whitemark community hall fit-out. Georgetown Council received $237,000, Meander Valley Council received almost $350,000 and West Tamar Council received $359,000. Launceston City Coun-
cil’s infrastructure funding of $578,000 allowed it to embark upon eight projects across its municipality, including the restoration of Lilydale Recreation Ground pavilion, the refurbishment of John Hart Conservatory and an upgrade of Albert Hall’s light and sound. Councils were telling me that their finances were as run-down in some respects as their infrastructure.

We on this side of the House know how important these facilities are to communities. A town hall is critical to the lifeblood of many rural and regional communities, and providing the means necessary to restore many of them is something of which this government has every right to be proud. The program, like this budget overall, is committed to supporting the jobs and small businesses of today through investment in the infrastructure we need for tomorrow. It is nation building, but it is also community building, town building and region building.

This budget is about home building. I made it a priority of mine to impress upon the Treasurer the positive impact of the expansion of the first home owners and first home builders grants. In the electorate of Bass, and across Tasmania, builders and builders associations were telling me of the positive impact it was having on their industry. I was delighted on budget night when the Treasurer indicated that it would indeed be extended. This is a measure that has been roundly welcomed by the Launceston Chamber of Commerce, by chambers of commerce across Northern Tasmania and by building industry groups like the Master Builders Association and the Housing Industry Association.

Make no mistake about it: this spending is targeted. It is necessary and it is what this country needs to ensure that we will emerge from this global recession faster than most advanced economies. Part of that recovery involves some tough decisions to reduce debt and return the budget to a surplus, a fiscal position to which this government is deeply committed. The Treasurer and the Prime Minister have made the decisions necessary to combat what is the worst recession since the Great Depression. But what does that actually mean? As others have done before me, I can tell you that it has wiped some $210 billion from the budget—I say again, $210 billion. This is the largest revenue downgrade faced by a Commonwealth government since 1931. Savings, quite frankly, have to be made and the decisions we have taken, though difficult, are absolutely necessary.

I touched briefly on those opposite earlier. I am of the view that their plan—and that is a word I use very loosely—is reckless, irresponsible and garbled and, quite frankly, takes the Australian people as fools, and fools, we know, they are not. Let us look at what those opposite are proposing as their alternative. They are running a dishonest scare campaign on debt. On the one hand they pretend they would not have to borrow, despite the global recession driving down government revenue by $210 billion. On the other hand, when put under pressure about whether they would increase taxes or cut services, the opposition seem completely confused and at odds with each other, admitting that they would have to borrow for the $210 billion collapse in revenues. This makes sense, because even the Leader of the Opposition, who is clearly not short of a dollar, would not expect to cover $210 billion without borrowing. And yet those opposite criticise the government for doing just that. They admit that their debt would be almost as big as ours—90 per cent as big. And we know that their plan—again, that is not an accurate description of the rhetoric of those opposite—would cost jobs.
The Australian people did not cause the global recession, yet thousands of hardworking men and women are having their jobs threatened as a result of it. Our job as a government is to do whatever it takes to safeguard as many of those jobs as possible. We are unapologetic about that. What we have done and what the Treasurer and Prime Minister have worked tirelessly to do is provide employment opportunities through infrastructure spending, through direct stimulus into households and through responsible spending.

At the same time, we are delivering on the commitment which we made to pensioners. Pensioners, I know, are doing it tough. There are more than 17,000 in Bass, many of whom have contacted me directly, and I am pleased that they will benefit through this budget—an extra $32.39 per week to full-rate single pensioners and $10.14 per week combined to couple pensioners. Carers, too, will benefit. The government recognises the vital role that carers play in the community. Those who receive a carer payment will receive the pension increases of $32.39 per week for singles on the full pension rate. As well, a permanent carer supplement of $600 a year for carer payment recipients and an extra $600 a year for carer allowance recipients for each person in their care will be introduced. The supplement will replace the government’s one-off bonuses. The first payment to carers will be made at the end of June.

Small business is also being assisted in these difficult financial times. We have boosted the successful tax break for small businesses in Bass, increasing it from 30 per cent to 50 per cent for eligible assets. This says nothing of the $731 million we will invest over five years to implement a paid parental leave scheme, starting in 2011. This is something about which I and many others on this side of the House are absolutely passionate. For too long Australia has lagged behind the rest of the world when it comes to looking after working parents.

For 11 years, riding high on the mining boom, those opposite did nothing, really, to advance our country. As with so much else, it has been left to Labor to do the things which are fundamentally and morally right. I congratulate the Treasurer and cabinet for taking these decisions when times are tough. We have a plan to return the budget to surplus by 2015-16. Ours is a small deficit by global standards; in fact, it is about half the average deficit of the major advanced economies, and our national debt will remain the lowest of any of the major advanced economies for the next decade.

In all, there are many things which distinguish us from those opposite, not the least of which is the philosophy which underpins this budget. It builds the infrastructure of tomorrow and supports the jobs of today. It maps a plan of recovery and will ensure that our nation is stronger and better placed as we emerge from this global recession. It is a budget which means I can assure the people of Bass that their health needs are being not only understood but responded to. Schools across Northern Tasmania will be better placed to educate our children. This budget funds the beginning of the National Broadband Network. In Tasmania, this will change how we deal with health needs in rural and remote communities. It will change how we do business and how we build networks. The potential is absolutely limitless. This is in stark contrast to those opposite, who have no plan, no idea and no respect for the Australian people. I commend this legislation to the House, confident that it maps a path to a better Australia.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (6.40 pm)—I rise to speak in the debate that we are having on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and
cognate bills. As the member for Bass scurries out, I will firstly address one comment that she made which was part of Labor’s grubby attack on the Leader of the Opposition for being successful in his business. This is a great campaign the Labor Party like to mount. They do not like people who are successful; they prefer people just to be all stuck together. I am remembering, of course, the hypocrisy of that, with the richest Prime Minister in Australia’s history, whose wealth is all made from government contracts. So the Labor Party might want to go down this path of grubby attacks on the Leader of the Opposition, but I would urge them to be cautious, particularly members in seats like that of the member for Bass. I will not dwell on that issue.

I rise tonight to speak on the first budget that I am responding to as the member for Mayo. Of course, it is the Rudd government’s second budget, but it is my first since I was elected in September last year. In preparing for tonight’s speech, I thought I would go back and look at recent budgets delivered by the Australian government. If you look at the last 12 or 13 years, what you see is a record of governments at the Commonwealth level paying off debt, returning the budget to surplus, delivering services and returning money to the taxpayers of Australia through well-targeted tax cuts—returning what they have earned, as it should be. On the other hand, in the last two years we have seen fiscal responsibility and economic plans go out the window, with the Rudd government not able to get a grasp on how to manage the Australian economy.

It is very important that we remember that in November 2007, when the Rudd government were elected, they inherited a budget surplus of $20-odd billion. They inherited an economy that was growing, as it had been for a period of around 14 years. They inherited net savings. The Future Fund set up by the former government was allocated to pay off the future liabilities of the government in relation to superannuation. In addition to that, there were several other savings accounts allocated to pay for things like higher education infrastructure. It was a budget that had been placed in this position not by some fortunate stroke of luck but by hard decisions made over a period of 11 years—well-thought-through decisions managing the Australian budget in a way which left this new government a legacy that they should not have been able to turn around so quickly, in 18 months.

What we have seen in this budget is the biggest spending budget since World War II, spending more money than the government has—more money than comes into the Commonwealth Treasury. This government would have us believe—we have just heard it in the ramblings from the member for Bass—that the debt and deficit are all because of international events beyond, of course, this government’s control. This is simply part of the spin doctoring that goes on with this government. This government is the Shane Warne of Australian politics. Never has a spinner had so much effect on our country as today. Even Shane Warne’s outstanding record of service to our country pales into insignificance when you see the spin doctoring that goes on around this budget.

The truth is that the spending in this budget is the largest in Australia since the Second World War. The government’s reckless spending has led to a bigger budget deficit than Paul Keating’s and Gough Whitlam’s governments, and we remember what impacts they had on future generations. It took the coalition government 10 years to pay off the excesses of the Keating government. Since the Rudd government was elected, it has spent $10 million per hour on new initiatives. So much for the idea that this is all due
to international events and international factors. The Labor spin does not add up.

This budget has seen the reality of the economic circumstances crash into the Hollowmen’s spin routine. We established that today in question time, with the Treasurer admitting that there will be $315 billion of borrowing, although very shortly after that the Prime Minister put some questions around whether or not that was the case when he said it would be $300 billion. There seems to be a $15 billion gap in the spin there. So you can forgive the member for Petrie for getting tripped up on what the figures were for the deficit and debt this morning at the doorstep—the great tradition in Parliament House of walking in through the media scrum—when she was sent out as one of the backbenchers from the other side to deliver the message on the day. You can understand her not understanding what the spin of the day was, because it seems to have been moving around very quickly—so much so that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer were not on message at all in question time. One said there would be $315 billion in borrowings—of course, that is the truthful figure—while the other, being the Prime Minister, said it would be $300 billion. But it was only a matter of $15 billion, and for the Labor Party that is nothing at all.

What this budget exposes is that the Labor government does not have a plan to manage the economy, nor does it have a plan to help Australia recover, to help small business—the engine room of the Australian economy—to recover. So much focus has been put by the Leader of the Opposition in recent times, rightfully, on how small business can help us grow out of this recession and out of these international events that are affecting Australia. We hear much from the other side of this chamber alleging that Australia is better placed than many other countries to face this global recession. That is true, and that is true because of the hard work put over 11 years into building budget surpluses, paying off debt and returning money to the Australian taxpayer—all things that this government is incapable of doing.

But, as usual, this government does not have an economic plan. It does not have a plan for recovery. It does not have a plan to stop the reckless spending that it is engaged in. It has a political plan. As I have touched on, one thing this government is very good at is politics and spin. It is the Shane Warne of Australian politics. The government is driven so much by spin doctors that it makes The Hollowmen look like a serious documentary. It is driven purely by spin doctors. We see that from government backbenchers in and out of this chamber. We saw the member for Bass in her ramblings just before, reading off scripts. They are very good readers, I will give them that. Some of them will move off the script sometimes, the member for Fowler being the obvious exception there, and occasionally talk about things which are related to their electorates and what they truly believe. But largely those on the other side are happy to follow what is drafted for them, and they stick to their spin very well.

But the problem with a political script is that it is not a substitute for an economic policy. The government’s claims to have a plan to take Australia out of deficit and return the budget to surplus are part of this spin doctoring which we see from this government on a daily basis. There is no genuine plan to get out of deficit and repay the debt. We saw that again today in question time. When asked about the ‘temporary debt’, the Prime Minister put a figure on the debt level in 2020. We know that by 2020 this government does not even have a fake plan to get out of debt. So much for it being temporary. Instead, as the member for Casey recently said, it is like arguing that the Second World
War was temporary. In fact, when it comes to debt, it is like arguing that the Hundred Years War was temporary.

So the government is playing out a political plan and does not have a strategy on how to deal with the economy. On their claims that they will return the budget to surplus, they make two justifications. The first is that they will impose budget rigour on themselves, which is very difficult to believe. As I said earlier in this speech, this government has delivered the highest spending budget since the Second World War. The increase in expenditure in this budget is 14 per cent. The government claims that, following 2011—interestingly, after the next election—it will reduce the real increase in spending to two per cent, which is a real cut in the history of government expenditure. Does anyone seriously believe that this Prime Minister and this government will be able to make no new spending announcements in the next six years? Does anyone seriously believe that they will get through a month without making a new spending announcement?

The claim that they will be able to stick to a two per cent real increase in spending is just unbelievable, so much so that Paul Kelly from the Australian newspaper, a very well known and very balanced commentator on economics, dedicated his column on Saturday to this spin-doctoring problem. He says:

This Government’s communications problem can be summarised in one question: does anybody believe that a Prime Minister and Treasurer too frightened to announce the deficit and debt numbers on television have the fortitude to wage a six-year-long campaign that keeps growth in government spending to below 2 per cent in real terms to achieve a budget surplus by 2015-16?

The answer is obvious. This is Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan’s real problem. Keen to promote themselves as decisive leaders during an economic crisis, this week they looked scared, silly and subservient to political spin. That sums up the issue that this government has. It is focused on the politics, not on the policy: ‘What’s the line that gets us through today? What’s the message that people want to hear which will make us popular leading into the next election?’ The government’s problem is that the economic reality is bash- ing up against the political spin doctoring. So the Shane Warnes of Australian politics are now finding the spin job all that much more difficult.

In question time today, the government asked us, ‘What would you cut if you were going to reduce the debt and deficit?’ They make the claim that for six years they will not increase government spending by more than two per cent, which in real terms means a decrease in government spending. So I put the question back to them: what will they cut? Which PBS items will go? We all know that the PBS is growing strongly, so which PBS item will not get on the list? Which health and medical research program will go? Which education program will go? Because something is going to have to go if they are going to meet this very ambitious target. In addition to claiming that they will meet that target for six years to bring them back to surplus, they are also claiming that, even though this has never happened before in Australia’s history, we are going to have an uninterrupted golden era of economic growth in this country with economic growth of 4½ per cent for the next six years. These are extraordinary claims. I would suggest that they have had some very positive thought processes in going through the preparation of the budget, because the claims are very difficult to match up with the reality. The deficit figures that we see in the budget papers are coming starkly into question. There is no plan to get us out of deficit; there is a political spin document. There is no plan to repay the debt that this government has introduced. It is a political spin document,
and that is becoming more apparent by the day. Unfortunately for the government, their political spin is catching up with them.

One of the other claims that the government members have among their talking points to raise in this debate—we have heard the Treasurer and the Prime Minister raise it and the member for Bass, rambling, said the same—is that Australia’s debt, in comparison to that of other countries, is relatively low. Well, of course it is—because we paid off all the debt. The UK and the US went into this economic crisis in substantially more debt than Australia—because we had no debt. It is interesting that all of a sudden those on the other side want to hold the United States up as a virtuous country. For years we have heard them rant on about the dangers of the United States and so forth, but now the United States is the great benchmark for the government’s economic policy. But just because other countries have got themselves into a position of enormous debt and deficit does not mean that we should. I think this justification is a furphy and it is desperate attempt to be part of the political spin document that the Hollowmen have drafted for the Shane Warnes of Australian politics.

This government went on a reckless spending spree because they had no economic plan. They have handed out $900 to every Australian. In effect, it is a loan that Australians will have to pay back at some point in the future. At this stage the bill is $9,000 for every man, woman and child. At current interest rates, that is $500 per year, and it is only going to go up. That is a sad thing for our kids’ future. It is going to reduce the services that the Commonwealth government will be able to pay for. The interest payments will become one of the biggest items in the budget each year. That of course means that there will be less money available for spending on government services.

I now want to refer to a couple of issues which this budget has impacted on—or not impacted on—in my electorate. As Deputy Speaker Georganas would understand, water is the No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 issue in my electorate. The Lower Lakes are in my electorate. They continue to suffer under this long drought. Although we have had some reasonable rainfall in the last month, that needs to continue for some time to bring the Lower Lakes back to a healthy condition. It saddens me greatly, as I am sure it saddens you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to see all this water up on the New South Wales North Coast and the Gold Coast when we are not able to get it over the divide and into the Murray-Darling catchment and down the river. So it was difficult to find that there is no focus on water in the budget. There is a lot of money allocated. I continue to say to the Minister for Climate Change and Water that there should be assistance for those people on the Lower Lakes. They are just being hung out to dry by the government at the moment. It is disappointing that there is no assistance to help them get through. Today we had the farce of the Rann government asking the community what they could do to help. After three years of this absolute crisis, today we saw the Rann government, 10 months out from an election, asking people how they could help. It is quite extraordinary. It is very disappointing that there is no additional assistance and no focus on the biggest issue facing South Australia—that is, the crisis in the Murray-Darling Basin and, in particular, the Lower Lakes.

The other issue in this budget which particularly affects my electorate is the attack on private health insurance. Unfortunately those on the other side have never been enamoured of private health insurance. We have seen that in the budget. We have heard the claims that this will only affect the rich, but what it does is attack all those with private health
insurance. It will also have an impact on those in the public system. The additional pressure on South Australian hospitals, which are in many places close to crisis point, will be that much higher. I think that is a big error by the government. We have said that we will oppose that measure in the budget. It is the only measure that we have indicated we will oppose. I support that decision by the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow cabinet. My electorate is an older electorate and, contrary to the common view, it is not a wealthy electorate. In my electorate, 62 per cent of people have private health insurance, so this is a very important issue and it is very disappointing that the government is taking this measure.

I want to put on the record for the Deputy Prime Minister and her department an issue which will be raised in a very serious manner at estimates next Wednesday and Thursday. The Kangaroo Island Area School, or the Kingscote Area School, has had a $9.5 million upgrade in the last 1½ years. On the surface of it, that sounds like a wonderful thing—and it is a wonderful thing. However, there are two distinct issues. The first issue is value for money. They got five buildings for $9.5 million—and half of that was federal government money. I am very concerned that the state education department has not used this money in the most efficient way. The cost of these buildings is extraordinarily high and the Commonwealth has got little value for its money.

We will be pursuing this issue in Senate estimates, and I put the Deputy Prime Minister and her department on notice tonight so they can prepare for it and ask questions of their South Australian colleagues. I think it is a very important issue, because it is lot of money, $9.5 million, and it should have built a new school. Instead, we got five new buildings.

The second aspect is that the workmanship appears to be—I visited it last week—of low quality. Whether that is due to the design or the actual workmanship, I do not know at this point. However, there seem to be significant issues with the building, and these are issues that need to be resolved.

The KI Islander’s editor, Shauna Black, has been following the story, and I congratulate her for doing so. She has come under attack from some in the company for raising this issue and I think that is disappointing. But I will not be put off by those kinds of attacks and we will pursue this issue with some vigour, because I think it is a serious issue—I am sure you would agree, Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas. We need to ensure that Commonwealth and state money is spent properly, and I hope that through the Senate estimates and other processes we can establish whether the money was spent properly, whether we got value for money out of this project and whether there needs to be further consideration of the matter.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (7.01 pm)—What a difference a year makes. This time last year the government spoke of the need to build a buffer, effectively, to protect ourselves from international turbulence. This year we have actually seen a downturn in the economic position worldwide—the worst in our lifetime at least. My grandparents can relate it back to what it was like in the 1930s, and that is the direct comparison we are now making. In the last 75 years, these are the worst world economic figures, and we have to grapple with them in terms of cushioning our economy from the effects of the worldwide recession.

Events have unfolded with astounding speed—as I said, within 12 months—and Australia, like every advanced economy, is in the midst of this recession. We know the global recession brings adversity, but what
we are trying to do is carefully position ourselves to create an opportunity, repositioning our economy so that we can best cushion ourselves against the worst effects of this international recession, and you can see that in this year’s budget.

This year’s budget has been carefully crafted to stimulate the economy to support jobs now, which is absolutely crucial, while at the same time investing in the long-term future of this country by funding the long-term savings necessary for fiscal sustainability and ensuring Australia’s net debt remains the lowest of any major advanced economy in the world. These are clear strategies that have been embarked upon in this budget. They are, quite frankly, central to the economic position: building jobs now by investing in the economic wellbeing of this country to position it for the future.

It is for this reason that I rise today to speak in support of the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and cognate bills that are required to implement the Rudd government budget. The measures in this budget build on the early and decisive action taken by this government to deal with the extent of the global recession, as that became clear. Mr Deputy Speaker, I invite you to contrast that with the position that was taken by those on the other side. Granted, it was the former Treasury spokesperson for the opposition who said this, but do not forget her words at that stage; she said we should not do anything pre-emptive, that we should ‘wait and see’ what happens. I wonder what people listening to this debate now would think if the Australian government’s response to the world’s worst economic position in 75 years had been: ‘Let’s wait and see what happens to the good people of Australia.’ That is what we were being invited to do.

It does not take much to realise that we are a government of decision. We decided that we would meet these challenges head-on and move to address them now by investing in Australia’s future, not by doing the things that the coalition government had done during its 11½ years in office. Unlike them, we are not stripping $1 billion out of education and ripping money out of the hospital system and paying for the future that way. We are, clearly, building for the future now, notwithstanding the economic times we find ourselves in.

This budget supports jobs now and delivers the investment needed to strengthen our economy in the medium term and into the long term by making those hard choices. In making those hard choices, we are carefully charting our way back to a surplus. This budget is the third stage of the economic stimulus plan, which, as we know, is helping to cushion our local communities against the world’s worst recession in living memory. Before I talk in detail about the impact of the recession and of this budget on my local community, I would like to spend a couple of minutes talking about a forum I hosted a couple of weeks ago.

Entitled Keep South-West Sydney Working, the forum was an initiative designed to get small businesses and local businesses, various service providers and not-for-profit organisations to come together and listen to the initiatives the Rudd government had developed, and work out how they could participate in the government’s $42 billion strategy. It was encouraging to see more than 220 local business members and people from not-for-profit organisations turn up on the day, and it is very interesting to see how they have responded. My office has been inundated with calls from local tradespeople, asking how they can participate in the Building the Education Revolution—how they can show their interest in that to become contractors working on the local schools—or be part of the $16 million that is being spent in my
local area to upgrade housing commission stock under the social housing initiative. These people are indicating their interest—and by the way, Mr Deputy Speaker, they are all locally based trade groups. They are all local tradies who are out there and now participating.

The Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Dr Craig Emerson, was also a guest speaker on this day, which was very good. He was able to take the various initiatives that this government had introduced over the course of the last 12 months and, clearly, through the budget, show how they would actually benefit businesses not only now but also in the future. Through planning their investments up to December next year and by investing in their businesses they would in return be not only growing their businesses but also employing people.

This seminar was quite significant. It was not something that was sponsored just by me. It was also sponsored by the Ingleburn, Liverpool and Campbelltown chambers of commerce, the Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils, the Macarthur Business Enterprise Centre, the Camden Council, the Campbelltown City Council and the Liverpool City Council. All these groups thought highly of an initiative that could actually help focus people on the values of the stimulus plan and they were all single-minded about how we get people in jobs and how we keep them working.

It was a very successful forum. From inquiries just through my own office, I know there are many local tradespeople out there expressing their interest in the Department of Education and Training and in becoming part of Building the Education Revolution. They are interested in becoming part of the maintenance and building program of social housing in the south-west of Sydney.

As I said from the outset, this is a budget about nation building and also building for recovery. The Rudd government’s budget is framed with these challenges in mind, including a historic $22 billion investment in the nation’s infrastructure including ports, roads and rail to support jobs now and laying the foundations for a stronger, more prosperous and more efficient economy for the future. Included in that is $52 million to continue the widening of the F5 Freeway—the Hume Highway, as we know it. You only have to drive along the F5 between Ingleburn and Campbelltown to see the amount of construction work that is now taking place there. This work commenced as an important step in meeting a key election commitment made by the Rudd government to the hardworking families to the south-west of Sydney. It will make a huge difference to all those who rely on this very busy road corridor. It is the main link between Melbourne and Sydney so it has a significant commercial value as well as supporting the growing population of the south-west of Sydney.

I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate George Kypreos and his company, Nace Civil Engineering, a local company in my electorate that won the $140 million project to widen the freeway. It is a vital piece of infrastructure and it is good to see a local company win that tender. Going with that is the creation of many hundreds of local contracting jobs, which this particular piece of infrastructure now supports.

I am very pleased to be able to inform the House of the commencement of another election commitment made to the people of Campbelltown: the $8 billion upgrade to the Campbelltown Sports Stadium. The stadium is an iconic feature in the south-west of Sydney and in particular my community in Campbelltown. It caters for many sports including rugby league, soccer and rugby union, and our commitment has gone a long
way towards helping transform the stadium and the adjoining facilities into one of the premier sporting precincts in Western Sydney.

During the construction phase of this $8 million project, the local council reliably tell me that this is now going to be supporting over 200 jobs in my local area. I am proud to be part of the Labor team that has recognised the importance of investing in the local community and investing in this infrastructure. It is in stark contrast to the Howard government that flatly refused all requests to upgrade this stadium. The Howard government’s representatives refused; they thought the money would be better spent elsewhere. It is a bit hard to believe that but that is now just a matter of fact which is recorded for posterity in all local newspapers.

We are also continuing to invest in building a world-class health system, which includes an increase of $20 billion to rebuild our hospitals. As I said earlier, in contrast to the former government, who decided to take $1 billion out of health, we are committing $20 billion to rebuilding our health system. Whilst I do not have a hospital in my electorate, I nevertheless have two large hospitals just outside adjoining my boundaries. For this reason I was thrilled to hear that through the budget we have delivered $46.9 million to Ingham Health Research Institute, a multifaceted research facility linked to the Liverpool City hospital. The Ingham Health Research Institute will focus that on health service research, population health research, clinical trials and research, and biomedical research. This investment is a strong show of faith that this government has in the health system of the south-west of Sydney and, because this facility is linked to our universities, this is an investment of some note in the research capability that we have in the south-west of Sydney.

The Rudd Labor government will invest $1.2 million to fix three very dangerous intersections in my electorate, which have seen crashes occurring over many years. They have been treated as part of the Black Spot Program. It is a serious investment in making safer roads for our local motorists and their families. These programs will make a real difference to our local roads. The projects are at Canterbury Road, Glenfield; Collins Promenade, Minto; and Narellan Road, Blairmount.

I would also like to spend a little time talking about the six-month extension to the first home owners boost, which will have a phase-out period starting on 1 October of this year. That was great news in my electorate.

Data from the New South Wales Office of State Revenue shows that there have been more grants under this scheme for first home buyers in Liverpool, within my electorate, than in any other suburb in New South Wales. People have the confidence, under this grant, to make that major decision in their life to actually go and acquire that first home—to invest in themselves and invest in their families. This is taking place in the outer metropolitan areas of Sydney and, as I say, we see with some pride that Liverpool has the largest number of grants and new starts. In fact, the Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek, last week came and visited my electorate. She came to Ingleburn to see firsthand how the new home grants have helped many aspiring first home buyers around my electorate in the south-west of Sydney and how this is supporting building and construction in the area.

It is interesting to note that, for every dollar that you invest in first home construction, there is an effective investment of about $1.90, I understand from the officials concerned, in your local community. When you consider the people who survey your block
of land and are involved in the design and building of your house and everything that goes into it—the production of the white goods, the purchase of the furniture and all of those things—this is a significant net boost to the local economy.

The families that we visited talked to us. One family was explaining to the minister how, before this, they had rented for the last six or seven years and they had seen their rents go up, with nothing they could do. This was the first opportunity they had to get into the market. They relied on the first home owners boost and, in turn, they are now well positioned to be a part of a growing community in the south-west of Sydney.

More than $2 million in Roads to Recovery funding will be provided to Camden, Campbelltown and Liverpool city councils to assist them in maintaining and upgrading their local roads. Again, the bulk of the contractors will be locally employed. There is more than $7.4 million for Campbelltown, Camden and Liverpool city councils, under the Community Infrastructure Program. That includes a $2.1 million redevelopment of Coronation Park Netball Complex—something that they have wanted to do for years but could never afford. There is $2 million to accelerate the upgrade of the Whitlam Aquatic and Leisure Centre in Liverpool—again, something that was high on the ‘desired’ list of the local community, but something that the local councils could not afford without this Community Infrastructure Program.

The government recognises the necessity of supporting small business during this global recession, and this budget has moved further in that direction. We acknowledge that small business is the job generator—not only for now, but also into the future. Under this budget, we have now increased the highly successful tax break increase from its 30 per cent, which was announced in the stimulus package, to 50 per cent as indicated in the budget. That will benefit the almost 10,000 small businesses that are registered in Werriwa.

This is what I said earlier. This is now inviting them, with our assistance, to invest in themselves, back themselves, grow their businesses, employ people and position themselves more successfully for our recovery program. This is growing small business. All the representatives of small business that I have spoken to, including the Macarthur Business Enterprise Centre, are as one on this particular point. It has been a significantly desired initiative, and certainly one well-received by the business community generally.

We are building on our education revolution—on our $5.7 billion investment over four years to deliver reforms across the higher education and innovation sectors, including $9.9 million for the Macarthur Building Skills Centre for the TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute at Ingleburn. The Macarthur Building Skills Centre is expected to help fill the emerging labour market needs in such areas as toolmaking and machining and to support southwest Sydney’s economic growth generally.

Significantly, the National School Pride program, one of three elements of the government’s $14.7 billion Building the Education Revolution, will deliver $9 million to 57 secondary and primary schools in my electorate of Werriwa. It will provide for more than 150 projects, including the refurbishment of classrooms, playing fields, installation of solar panels and the improvement of disability access.

I am also pleased to advise that four of my local primary schools in stage 1 of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century program are now participating in $7 million of new
infrastructure projects in those schools. The remaining primary schools will all be able to benefit in receiving up to $3 million as they move to install either their meeting facilities or new COLAs et cetera. This in turn has a significant effect on our local business community and our construction industry. We see it now.

In the time that I have available, I want to say that I know that Australia has been one of only two countries in the OECD, along with the United States, which did not have a comprehensive paid maternity leave scheme. Historically, this government has now delivered on a paid maternity scheme in support of Australian families—(Time expired)

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (7.21 pm)—This is a budget that realises the classic Labor trifecta of higher debt, higher deficits and higher unemployment. Each time they are elected to office they promise they will not return to their old ways. But at the first opportunity we have seen this government return to good old-fashioned Labor form. So the classic story of Australian politics continues. Labor are elected, they lose control of the nation’s finances and subsequently the coalition will be called upon to come in again and clean up Labor’s mess. And clean it up we will. In Australia’s interest this must happen sooner rather than later. Just imagine what Labor would do if they were given a further opportunity at the next election.

This budget reveals two cold, hard facts about the Rudd government. Firstly, that Labor have no ticker for the truth when it comes to the factors of this budget and, secondly, that Australians are now paying the price for Labor’s reckless spending. In terms of having no ticker for the truth they have failed to be honest and upfront about the budget bottom line. They were unable to mention the deficit, they were unable to mention the number of unemployed that were to be produced and they were unable to speak of the level of debt. It was not until today that the Prime Minister and even the Treasurer came to this dispatch box and levelled with the Australian people about the bottom line of this nation’s finances.

This is a budget that delivers a dividend of one million Australians out of work. It is a budget that delivers a $188 billion debt, that saddles every man, woman and child with a $9,000 debt and with an interest bill to boot of $500 per year. This is a budget that delivers $57.6 billion in deficit in this budget year coming, 4.9 per cent of GDP and more than $200 billion of accumulated deficits over five years. While claiming that their debt is a function of a revenue shortfall, they fail to observe to the Australian people that two-thirds of this debt is a product of their own new spending commitments since they were elected. That is $10 million an hour for every hour since they were elected to office.

In being upfront about the nation’s finances I have heard speaker after speaker from the government come in here and ‘set the scene’ as they would like to say. We also heard the Prime Minister today accusing the coalition of actually trying to talk down the economy, which was an amazing allegation to make against the coalition, given that this is what this Prime Minister and his Treasurer have been doing since the day they took up office. It started with their phoney war and their political war on inflation that drove up interest rates and put the brakes on our economy in the second half of last year, just when we needed it to be working at its optimal level. They showed it through their inability to acknowledge the strength of the Australian economy as we went into these difficult times. They failed to acknowledge the strength of the Australian economy that was built up as a result of the economic management of the Howard government.
As we went into those difficult times this is something that would have provided a great deal of reassurance both to the Australian community and to those offshore looking in at our economy. It would have been a good thing for the Prime Minister to say that we are well prepared for this because of the economic management that has been followed in this country for the last 10 years. A week or so ago, when asked on Sky News by David Spiers to acknowledge that he had inherited a very sound set of books and a strong economy, he could not bring himself to do it. He could not bring himself to honestly and reasonably acknowledge the legacy that was left to him by the previous government. It might be a source of pride and vanity for the Prime Minister that he cannot overcome in order to acknowledge these things. But he must and should have overcome them at the time he went into these troubled waters. It was important to reassure the markets, to reassure Australians and to reassure those overseas looking in to see how Australia would fare to see that the Prime Minister of this country actually knew what had been going on with economic management in the previous 10 years. And he could not bring himself to do it.

He also invoked the imagery of flak jackets and raincoats to describe our economic prospects and the situation of the economy that we were faced with. He sought to appropriate the global economic downturn that was swamping the world’s markets as a cover for an unbridled social spending program that we have seen unfold over the last 18 months. He also sought to assert in this place, as others have in the course of this debate, that this is the worst economic downturn in Australia that we have seen since the Great Depression. While it is true that global conditions—and no-one would dispute this fact—are unprecedented, so was the level of economic and financial strength inherited by the Rudd government to cope with these challenges. An article in the Wall Street Journal Asian edition concluded on the budget that Australia enters the global financial crisis with one of the soundest fiscal positions amongst developed nations. ‘Now,’ they say, ‘thanks to the Labor government of Kevin Rudd that’s no longer the case.’ They went on to say that Tuesday’s sea of red comes largely courtesy of Labor’s political agenda not the global recession.

We have not suffered a collapse in this country of our housing markets as we have seen in overseas countries. We have not seen a collapse of our banking system. It has remained robust because of the sound measures brought into our banking system under the term of the previous government. We have not seen high levels of debt at the start of this crisis. The Prime Minister likes to talk about other countries around the world and their higher levels of debt. That is because they had much higher levels of debt to begin with. They had higher levels of debt of around 70 per cent of GDP before this even began. If we are going to look at a rate of growth of debt as a proportion of GDP this government would outstrip every single government in the world in terms of putting the accelerator down and increasing the level of debt because we started with negative debt. There was tens of millions of dollars in the bank and unemployment was at historic lows. This was not the experience of other countries with whom the Prime Minister now wishes to compare his performance. With the exception of Canada these countries were virtually all in deficit and debt. I have observed on a previous occasion that the G20 would probably better be known as the D20 for debt and deficit because that is the club of debt and deficit that this government has now signed Australia up to.

Our policy in addressing the economic crisis globally must be focused on the Aus-
Australian recession. In comparison to previous recessions, in particular the early nineties, contrary to what is being suggested by those opposite and leading people around the country to believe, it is definitely not clear that the recession we are now facing will be worse than that suffered in the early 1990s. That is also a point which I understand the Reserve Bank Governor has made some reference to and appears to agree with. In the early nineties unemployment reached 10.7 per cent, the economy ground to a halt and revenues collapsed.

In thinking about that time in the early 1990s, the other liberality with the truth that the Prime Minister has sought to engage in in terms of selling and spinning this budget is that the debt and deficit is the product of unprecedented collapses in revenue. Let us look at the record. In this budget revenues will have declined from a peak in 2006-07 of 26.1 per cent of GDP to 23.6 per cent of GDP in the year 2010-11. That is a fall of 2.5 percentage points over three years, after which time it is forecast that revenues will increase again as a percentage of GDP. In 1992-93, revenues hit a low of 22.3 per cent of GDP. That is 1.3 percentage points lower than the actual low-point forecast in this budget. It is a fall of 2½ per cent of GDP over the three years leading up to that year, which is exactly the same as what is forecast in this budget, but it is a fall ultimately of 4.4 percentage points of GDP since the peak of the revenue in 1986-87 at 26.7 per cent of GDP.

So what we had in the early 1990s as a result of the recession we had to have was a drop in revenue of 4.4 per cent of GDP over that time. Compare that to the drop in revenue of just 2.5 per cent of GDP outlined in these budget papers. So suggesting that somehow the revenue drop that we are now facing in terms of what is presented in these budget papers is unprecedented is again being very liberal with the truth, and I suggest the government has no ticker for the truth when it comes to being honest about these figures. Perhaps it was not that bad under former Prime Minister Paul Keating when you compare it to the way the debt and deficit is being managed by this government.

The real cause of our debt and deficit is the Rudd government’s reckless spending. At 28.6 per cent of GDP—this is the big figure—it is a record high since World War II. It has eclipsed even the largesse of previous Labor governments and is staying that way over the forecast period. This is a government that simply believes it can borrow and spend its way out of trouble with other people’s money.

The budget papers also go on to make some very heroic forecasts. This is basically their plan for getting us out of deficit. These forecasts are heroic, and even the IMF tends to agree. In the Australian Michael Stutchbury wrote on 19 May:

The IMF’s published forecasts contained in last month’s World Economic Outlook indicate a deeper recession than foreshadowed in the budget, including a 1.5 per cent contraction this year followed by a weak 0.6 per cent recovery next year.

He goes on to say:

The IMF staff estimates suggest the Australian economy will grow 1.9 per cent in 2011, 2.8 per cent in 2012, 2.9 per cent in 2013 and 3 per cent in 2014.

He concludes:

This almost certainly would prevent the budget returning to surplus in 2015-16 …

And he notes:

The federal Opposition claims a 3 per cent recovery profile could see the budget’s $188 billion net public debt projection blow out to about $250 billion.

A lot of stock is being put in these forecast numbers. The government have no plan—
other than their plan for spin—for getting us out of debt. This is a dangerous cocktail we are seeing from this government—combining the Whitlamesque nature of their spending with the Carresque nature of their political spin machine in seeking to pull the wool over the eyes of the Australian public. If the Australian people want to see a forecast of their future under this government then they only need to go to New South Wales. The spin eventually catches up and the state they manage spins out of control, and that will be the case for this country unless this government is removed.

Unlike previous recessions, we will seek to recover in the years ahead. I note also, to cast doubt on the way these optimistic forecasts have been put forward, that at least in the 1980s and in the 1990s—and there were many deficiencies in these governments, and we have a minister of one of those governments here at the table—they had some commitment to economic reform. At least when we came out of the recession of the 1990s and the 1980s we were moving into a less regulated market and a less regulated economy. What we are seeing now as we seek to climb out of recession is an economy saddled by debt and deficit and also an economy that is being reregulated, whether it is in the labour market or other areas, and that will stifle our growth when it comes time to grow once again.

Another area where the government has lacked the ticker for the truth is investing in economic infrastructure. Of all the talk of infrastructure and of all the wearing of hard hats and luminous vests only $8 billion is being spent on roads, rail and ports. That is half of what they are spending on school halls and a third of what they borrowed and gave away. They like to project all of this spending that they have been engaged in as hard economic infrastructure that will enable them to pay off debt, but that is simply not true. It is a big con. It is only $8 billion.

They extinguished the Building Australia Fund that the coalition left behind for them. They extinguished it; it is all gone. The education fund is virtually all gone. They went and spent all the money that was left. After going through the cash splashes and other things, they had so little left for roads, rail and ports that I am not surprised that in my electorate the F6 once again completely missed out and was ignored by Labor, as has happened at the state level for so many years. That critical road link in Sydney’s infrastructure was ignored yet again by this government.

Australians are paying the price for Labor’s reckless spending. In the time I have remaining I want to draw attention to some very serious areas of neglect in terms of Labor’s reckless spending. The price will have to be paid, particularly with the withdrawal of the Medicare safety net. The changes to the Medicare safety net mean that couples who are dreaming of becoming mothers and fathers and in need of fertility treatment will have to either dig even deeper into whatever reserves they have to realise that dream or abandon that dream. This is something that my family, my wife and I have had a great deal of personal experience with. We ultimately were blessed with a miracle child, and I referred to this in my maiden speech in this place. She was the answer to a lifetime of prayer and 14 years of painful, invasive and heartbreaking fertility treatment.

The desire to have children is the most positive, life-affirming instinct we have as human beings. This desire does not go away when you are sat down and told that your chances of having children are remote. You do not choose this burden. Those families that are out there and have seen this measure in the budget have not chosen this burden. It
has been thrust upon them by life circumstances. They will deal with it as best they can. But what they resent is a government that just does not get it. The feeling of loss at every failed attempt of fertility treatment is indescribable. As parents, you do not grieve over the failure of a medical procedure; you grieve the loss of a child. We console ourselves with the thought that one day perhaps we will be reunited with our unborn children in another place at another time. But most families understand that this is the sacrifice that they make when they move through this treatment. Sacrifice is something that these families mostly know. For those who have been blessed with children, we know the sacrifice of having children but we know the joy of parenthood at the same time. But, for those who go through fertility treatment, all they know of for years and years is sacrifice.

The Prime Minister can seek to justify this change in the Medicare safety net any way he likes. He can say that these families are undeserving; he can go on to doctor bashing and say that the doctors are overcharging. But the truth is simply this: as some families in the last few months have sat down to look at the $900 in cash payments that they received, other families—would-be mothers and fathers—are going to sit down as a result of this budget and decide whether their dream of children is going to proceed or not. This is something that should weigh very heavily on the minds of this Prime Minister and those who sit on the other side of the table here. They should think very carefully about this. About one child in a classroom of 25 has been born with the assistance of reproductive technology. The introduction of a cap on payments under the safety net for access to assisted reproductive technologies will cost families between $1,500 and $2,000 per cycle.

Sandra Dill, the CEO of Access, the group that represents people involved in the fertility industry and those seeking fertility treatment, in a media release issued by Access said:

… the Labor Government lacked any kind of compassion and understanding that infertility is a devastating medical condition. ‘Infertility is not a choice. The one in six people who need medical help have no control over this condition.’

She went on to say that in 2005 Julia Gillard launched a public petition to protest against proposed limits for access to IVF Medicare funded treatments. She went on:

… but we now see the current Government, voted in on the absolute guarantees they provided to maintain the Medicare Safety Net as it was, completely breaking their word.

She went on to say:

More than 40,000 individuals have been able to access IVF services with the support of the Medicare Safety Net in 2008 and nearly 11,000 babies are born each year as a result.

The cruellest blow is to IVF patients trying to manage the expense of treatment one hand, while balancing the government’s token nine hundred dollar stimulus cheque in the other. IVF is the last chance for many to have a child of their own and the Medicare Safety Net has ensured that every Australian has that opportunity. The Government’s decision has taken away many Australian’s last chance to have a baby.

The Labor Party promised not to change the Medicare safety net.

The Deputy Prime Minister, while in opposition, collected the signatures of over 1,300 people to a petition condemning the previous government for considering changes in this area, which they rightly decided not to proceed with. And she has the gall to come in here and be part of a government that is doing exactly the same thing and worse. When I look at this budget and this measure in particular, I see their failure to understand the consequences of their actions. (Time expired)
Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (7.41 pm)—The government’s budget for 2009-10 should be seen from two different points. Firstly, from the big picture view, the budget is squarely focused on the issue of employment, both maintaining levels of employment in the face of the global economic crisis and creating new jobs through spending on public works and improvements to our existing education, health and public housing assets. It is the most ambitious program of public spending in our history, coming at a time when the private sector is in a slump caused by the near collapse of private credit worldwide and the loss of business and consumer confidence that goes with it. As a budget which focuses on employment, it makes no apology for giving much-needed assistance to the working people of Australia. Of all the things that a population can expect from a government, the economic base to maximise employment opportunities is our most crucial need.

From the other point of view, the budget must also ensure that the sacrifices made during hard economic times are not borne by one section of the population alone. We cannot ignore the needs of the victims of this recession, those women and those men who will lose their jobs or their small businesses. We need to see the consequences for individuals and families in the same way that we see the losses of victims of natural disasters. We saw with the recent Victorian bushfires that Australians opened their hearts and their wallets to assist the victims of that disaster. We cannot ignore the plight of those whose lives are thrown into turmoil by the loss of livelihood and income. At this time of crisis, we should also reflect on the priorities of government and how to best direct resources to get our nation back on the path to prosperity for all.

To come back to the big picture, from the opposition we have had nothing but wailing about the debt that we are passing on to our children and our grandchildren. I feel that that is a lot of rot. In the electorate of Fowler, when parents and grandparents worry about their children and grandchildren it is about whether they will keep their job or whether they will be able to find a job. With adult unemployment over 10 per cent and teenage unemployment over 40 per cent in my electorate of Fowler, I know what they are most concerned about.

This is where there is a stark contrast between Labor and the coalition parties. I very much doubt that parents and grandparents in Fowler lie awake at night worrying that their children will pay higher taxes in 10 years time, but I do know that the prospect of losing your job is a very real fear here and now. The opposition’s wailing about the deficit is not only out of touch with the needs of the electorate, it is also out of touch with economic reality. I would be the last person to lecture the House on economic theory, but I will borrow the words of Ross Gittins, the economics editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. Following the budget Ross Gittins wrote:

… the primary reason for the budget’s rapid transformation from large surplus to huge deficit is the economy’s descent into recession, which has greatly reduced the tax revenue the Government now expects to receive.

He went on to say:

The recession would also be worsening the budget balance by greatly increasing the number of people to whom the Government has to pay the dole.

So the first point to note is that the budget balance deteriorates automatically whenever the economy goes into recession. It happens without the Government lifting a finger.

The next thing to note is that, though this sounds like a bad thing … the deterioration in the budget balance is a good thing.
Why? Because it helps to stabilise the economy. At the very time when households and businesses start spending less—and thus threatening jobs—the government starts spending a lot more than it’s extracting from the economy in taxation. So when the private sector contracts, the public sector expands, thus reducing the decline in the economy and so limiting (but not eliminating) the rise in unemployment.

But the opposition can only wail about debt. They have no concern for the working people of Australia and even less for those likely to lose their jobs in this recession.

But, while I can fully agree with the government’s macroeconomic strategy, I am left with the last line of my quote from Ross Gittins:

… reducing the decline in the economy and so limiting (but not eliminating) the rise in unemployment.

It is in this area that I find some aspects of the budget disappointing. While the Treasurer has acknowledged that we will see a significant increase in the number of unemployed, as many as 350,000, the budget is short on details for measures to assist those out of work as a result of the recession. There was no increase in the level of benefit paid to job seekers, only an allowance for those undertaking training. But in most cases this could be expected to be spent on additional living costs associated with that training.

We have a long way to go before we have policies in place, such as those in Scandinavian countries, which see redundant workers placed in appropriate retraining and job placement programs from the day they finish work. Unemployment should be a transition from one job or career to another, not a stressful period of uncertainty and depression. Even under new job assistance contracts we can expect the outcomes for newly retrenched workers to be mixed and a long way short of what is needed by those who have lost a livelihood as a result of the recession.

As far as the government’s infrastructure program is concerned, I have to ask the question of whether its programs are targeted as well as they could be. It is too easy to overlook the objective of maximising the employment potential of many projects. It is hard to see how a textile worker retrenched from Bonds at Wentworthville could be employed in the planning and design of Sydney’s West Metro or how one retrenched from Bonds at Cessnock could get a job driving a bulldozer on the Hunter Expressway project. It reminds me of the story about the World Bank planning a development project in a Central African republic. They decided to build a road between two major towns. The World Bank engineer said it would be a simple job for a couple of Caterpillar D9s. As there was a big problem of local unemployment, the local official said, ‘Why not use 1,000 men with shovels?’ to which a social worker added, ‘Why not a million men with teaspoons?’ I think the moral of the story is that we have to get the balance right between building infrastructure and creating jobs. We cannot just count the number of jobs; we have to look at what both gives us useful assets and maximises job opportunities.

In looking at some of the projects announced, I really have to look at whether the jobs required on those projects will suit the skills and experience of many who will lose their jobs in the course of this recession. This applies particularly to women. This itself raises a number of issues related to employment in this economic climate. When we think of the impact of job losses on the workforce, we probably think firstly of the male ‘breadwinner’, to use an old, old term. But for many women losing a job or having your hours cut is an equally disastrous outcome. Two-income families are the norm in West-
ern Sydney. The loss of income can be very, very devastating.

I understand that major banks and some other financial institutions have developed policies which offer assistance with loan repayments to families affected by the loss of income. As with other forms of assistance offered by governments, we must ensure that women, whether as single women, sole parents, carers or partners in a two-income family, are not treated differently in access to debt assistance or retraining programs.

While I am on the subject of job creation projects, we know that the services sector has been the fastest growing sector of the economy and that women make up most of its workforce. We need to appreciate that we are building a society as well as an economy and that the materials for building a just, fair and prosperous society are more than concrete and steel; we need to build the skills of our people as well. That is one form of infrastructure that maximises employment opportunities.

Having raised those concerns, I want to turn to one budget item that I regard as a disgraceful waste of public money, one which represents a continued attack on the rights of a group of Australian workers. Under the portfolio of the Minister of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations we have an appropriation of $33,446,000 for the office of the Australian Building and Construction Commission. Some of us, especially on the Labor side, recall that at the time of the last election Labor promised to allow the ABCC to continue until 2010 and that a review would be conducted, and I for one would have expected this budget item to be much reduced because it is for only half a year. We have of course had the Wilcox review, which recommended the extension of the ABCC for some time, but what staggers me about the ABCC is the size of its funding.

It is more than $33 million a year. I am sure it is great at job creation for union-bashing lawyers, but that is one group of workers I would like to see retrenched.

The ABCC is limited to building and construction industry workplaces, but its budget is almost half that of the former Office of the Workplace Ombudsman, who was responsible for all other Commonwealth workplace laws. Comparing the ABCC with Comcare, the government’s workplace safety and rehabilitation body, which gets $5 million this year, the ABCC gets six times as much. Here we have a situation where on average one construction or mining worker dies from a workplace injury every week, but this government spends six times as much on union witch-hunts as it does on workplace safety for its employees. It is when you put the appropriation for the ABCC into context by comparing it with other government agencies that you see that it is a very well fed monster. If you compare the ABCC’s appropriation with agencies in the Attorney-General’s portfolio, you see that it receives more than twice the $13 million allocation to the Australian Human Rights Commission, more than the $28 million going to the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia and more than twice the $16 million appropriated to the High Court of Australia, the body whose responsibility is ‘to interpret and uphold the Australian Constitution and perform the functions of the ultimate appellate court in Australia’.

If you look at the appropriation of the Australian Crime Commission, it receives $95 million and is responsible for reducing the impact of serious and organised crime in Australia, yet the ABCC gets more than one-third of the amount that goes to fighting serious and organised crime in Australia. I am sure that all Australians can sleep safe in their beds knowing that the government spends so much on chasing a few union members while drug rings and bikie gangs...
can run riot in our community. But looking at the real concerns of ordinary Australians, in the face of losses of more than $30 billion by 200,000 Australian investors and the collapse of companies like Storm Financial, Great Southern and Timbertcorp, the Australian Securities and Investment Commission will spend an extra $20 million this year chasing corporate crooks. That is $33 million to chase building workers and $20 million to chase real criminals in business suits.

How does the ABCC’s appropriation compare with the total appropriation for the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority? It gets $23 million, $10 million less than the ABCC. Just what are the priorities of this government—protecting the savings of ordinary Australians or threatening building workers? It is like the Keystone Cops going after the wrong guy. And what is that $33 million worth to the Australian economy and improving productivity? It should be working wonders, because the ABCC gets only a million dollars less than the Productivity Commission.

But, to really understand how much is wasted on the ABCC, we should compare its appropriation to the salaries of members of this House. The ABCC gets more than the combined base salaries of all 150 members of this House as well as the 76 senators, and what has the ABCC achieved? That is a question that will have to be answered. If I could send a memo to the razor gang working on next year’s budget, it would say to save the people of Australia $33 million and axe the Australian Building and Construction Commission.

On one final point in my response to this budget I must express my concern with the proposed increase in the age of eligibility for the age pension from 65 years to 67. I can recall a time when we looked at reducing the age of retirement to 55 years. My greatest concern, especially for the working families that I represent in Fowler, is for those workers in industries which require physical endurance. It is not uncommon to find workers unfit to continue many years before the present retirement age. For many the result is that they spend their years prior to retirement on a disability pension. And we must remember that for women we are increasing the retirement age from 60 to 65; I have already noted a number of issues arising from this change. I would expect that the planned increase in the pension age would be preceded by an inquiry into work and life issues and ways of ensuring that all Australians are able to plan a rewarding working life as well as enjoy a healthy and varied lifestyle.

In closing, overall this is a budget that provides for the working men and women of Australia. It does focus on jobs, which is critical. Time will definitely tell if the expected increase in unemployment has its effect.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (7.59 pm)—The government has taken the steps necessary in the circumstances as this country faces the greatest economic challenge we have faced since the Great Depression. It is important to look historically at what Labor governments do and how they respond in the circumstances because it seems that it is our legacy to be elected at times of great confrontation. Whether it is war or economic difficulties, it is Labor governments that come to the fore.

Labor governments look after those who are less well-off but they also meet the challenges they confront and at the same time invest in infrastructure, in jobs, in schools and in hospitals to not just ameliorate the economic circumstances of the country and of the people of the country but also invest for the future and for the great recovery that we all hope and anticipate will take place in the future. We know that has happened be-
fore and we know that the Rudd Labor government will attack the problem and work hard every day to overcome the challenges that it faces, because Labor governments have always done that—like Curtin’s and Chifley’s. We saw Whitlam, for example, internationalise the economy in many ways. We got rid of Black Jack McEwen protectionism; Whitlam reduced tariffs by 25 per cent. The other side of the House simply did not have the wit or the will to bring in something that would help Australian business like the Trade Practices Act. It was Whitlam who did that.

Labor governments have not just assisted the profitability of business but also helped people in the economy. The Hawke and Keating governments internationalised the economy. They floated the dollar, opened up the banking system, built superannuation, had the prices and incomes accord and laid the groundwork for the prosperity that the Howard government inherited. That is the reality of political life in this country and in the history of Labor governments. And now the Rudd Labor government, which is facing the greatest global economic crisis that the world has seen since the Great Depression, takes up that challenge.

We are now also dealing with the consequences of the inaction, inertia and indolence of the Howard years. There are the structural deficits that they created. We saw a lack of investment in infrastructure, which we see manifested in terms of ports, rail and roads. What is the legacy of the Howard government? What did they do when they got in? They gave us a public health system that was deinvested by $1 billion. They wrecked public housing in this country. They destroyed the Commonwealth Dental Scheme. What is their legacy? They imposed another tax on the Australian public—the GST—which they said they would never do. And their great reform was Work Choices. That is the legacy of the Howard government. We hear so much nonsense from those opposite about this economic nirvana they had. We hear about this new Jerusalem under John Howard that we are now destroying and sending off to Hades or hell. That is simply not true. It is historical revisionism by those sitting on the opposition benches.

The truth is that with the stimulus packages the government has acted in a way that will cushion the impact of the global recession upon the Australian people. But at the same time we have invested nationally in hospitals, in roads, in rail, in infrastructure and in the greatest modernisation of our school system we have ever seen—$14.7 billion. We see it in our electorates every day. In the experience of every politician in this House, there would not be a day that goes by on which he or she does not see the consequences and the advantages of this to the children, the teachers and the communities of their electorates. But the opposition voted against every single one of the measures that would put community infrastructure and the school modernisation funding into their local constituencies. Those opposite may have, but we on this side of the House are proud to say that we supported it. The budget bills—the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010 and cognate bills—provide so much in terms of the national response to the global financial crisis.

Locally in my electorate as well we have experienced tough times in the past. My electorate is Ipswich and the rural areas outside. When the Depression hit us back in the 1920s and the recession hit us in the 1990s we in Ipswich in the rural areas suffered because so much of our industry was manufacturing and coal based. The truth is that locally we are seeing benefits from the Rudd Labor government and certainly, by these appropriations bills, we will see in my electorate of Blair the manifestation of the Rudd
Labor government’s commitment to nation building. The failure of those opposite is most manifest in my electorate of Blair in the lack of critical infrastructure for 12 long years—the failure of the coalition to invest in the national road system in the electorate and in neighbouring electorates, such as Moreton and Oxley.

The Rudd Labor government has invested $884 million in my electorate in a nation-building program that will support thousands of jobs. It involves a road that those opposite might like to hear about called the Ipswich Motorway. My predecessor and those opposite opposed the upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway. Currently we are seeing investment by the Rudd Labor government in this vital infrastructure as part of our national highway system. We are seeing thousands of people benefit locally with jobs and we are seeing millions of dollars thereby being injected into the local Ipswich economy.

For a long time we campaigned vigorously to get the ear of the federal government and Mr Howard, the then Prime Minister, to convince them to invest in this infrastructure for the health, safety and economic development of the local economy and for the people in the Ipswich and West Moreton region and in the south-west of Brisbane. But it fell on deaf ears. They did not bother to do so, even when they were receiving billions of dollars at the height of the mining boom. When it came to the motorway, those opposite showed that they were the party of the past; they were not the party of the future. It is the Rudd Labor government that is investing to improve the economy of Ipswich and to finally connect Ipswich in the way it should be with Brisbane and the rest of South-East Queensland. Those opposite failed to grasp the necessity of this infrastructure and why it was absolutely necessary in the circumstances.

The Rudd Labor government is investing in my electorate in many ways. Not only have we seen something in the order of $30 million put into local schools with announcements in round 1 and round 2 of the School Pride and the schools for the 21st century funding as part of the Building the Education Revolution funding, but we are also seeing an amazing amount of money being put into the Ipswich economy. We saw, for example, $10 million in funding granted by the Rudd Labor government to bring down the costs of new homes in the Walloon area, west of Ipswich city. It is an area just outside the RAAF base at Amberley. We are seeing a huge amount of money being put in there which will enable people who move into that area to purchase lots for $10,000 less than they would otherwise be able to. It will open up the whole area. In fact, a former National Party candidate and now a councilor in division 10, David Pahlke, said publicly that he thought this was best thing to happen in that western part of Ipswich during his tenure in the Ipswich City Council—in his lifetime, almost. That is part of the investment of the Rudd Labor government to the Ipswich area, which also includes $60 million as part of the $1.1 billion redevelopment of the RAAF base in Amberley. This will build it into a super base, bringing the Super Hornets to the super base, creating infrastructure, creating jobs and putting millions of dollars back into the Ipswich economy. We are building 133 defence houses as part of our nation-building and jobs strategy in the Ipswich area. That means local tradesmen—plumbers, electricians—working locally, bringing money into the economy, supporting local jobs, supporting local families and supporting local infrastructure. That is the manifestation of the Rudd government’s commitment to the Ipswich area.

Ipswich is a fast-growing area according to the ABS data. It has grown over four per
cent in the past 12 months and it is the fastest growing area in Queensland according to the statistics that have been released. The Rudd government is committed not only to school infrastructure, or roads; it is also committed to giving our children the chance in life that they deserve. We have seen close to $2 million worth of computers, the tools of the 21st century, being allocated to high schools in the area—and let me tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I have gone around the schools in my electorate I have seen that that money is well spent. It allows children—whether they live in Boonah or Brisbane, Kalbar or Kingaroy, or Riverview or Redcliffe—the same chance in life to access the information that they need to get their talents, skills and abilities to prosper so that they can earn an income.

That is good for business. It is not just good for social equity and social capital; it is good for business. It makes businesses more profitable when they have better trained and educated workers. I know because for 20 years, before I was elected to this House, I was the senior partner in a business law firm and I ran a business. I built it up to a multi-million-dollar operation, so I know what it is like to run a business. I know what it is like to have to deal with staff and all of the challenges—paying the rent, looking after the payroll, dealing with employees and meeting commitments. I know what it is like in these circumstances and, if we can help businesses, that is good. If we can make sure our young people are trained as well as they possibly can be, that will improve productivity and improve small business.

Just last Saturday I was speaking to the manager of a local car dealership in my area, James Sturges of Ross Llewelyn Motors, at the Ipswich Arts Foundation’s 10-year celebration of the art gallery in Ipswich. A wonderful place, the Ipswich Art Gallery; it is the most visited regional art gallery in the country. James was telling me that the 30 per cent tax deductibility for small business was a godsend to his business; they had sold more cars recently than they had done previously. He was commending the government mightily for the work that they have done, not just with the 30 per cent but with the 50 per cent tax deductibility.

In the many mobile offices I run, and the country shows and the shopping centres I visit around the Blair electorate, I have run across many young people who have taken advantage of the first home owners scheme increases that we have brought in as part of our stimulus packages, which are a part of this budget as well. There have been 59,000 people who have taken up that challenge. I remember a young couple who came to me at Brassall Shopping Centre. They were so excited and they wanted me to witness their signatures on their applications. They were absolutely thrilled at the prospect that for the first time in their lives they could purchase a home in North Ipswich. Their son was also very excited because he liked the yard that they were purchasing. They were absolutely beside themselves with delight.

The investment in community infrastructure is just so important, and that is opposed by those opposite. They opposed this part of the stimulus package, as well as all of the others. I have seen in my local area, as part of the $800 million Community Infrastructure Program—the largest ever federal investment in local infrastructure across Australia—$661,000 given to the Lockyer Valley Regional Council, $921,000 given to the Ipswich City Council and $667,000 given to the Scenic Rim Regional Council. That is a total of $2.249 million. With that money, Ipswich City Council has done a lot of things: it has done some work on the Ipswich civic centre, the Canning Street footpath, and the Phillip Street kerbing and channelling, and a number of other areas were also at-
tended to. The regional council in the Lockyer Valley spent an enormous amount of money on a lot of projects right across the Lockyer Valley—from Murphy’s Creek to Laidley and to Lake Apex in Gatton, right across the area.

I just want to focus on one part of that, and that is the money that was given, which was opposed by those opposite, as part of our Community Infrastructure Program. As I said, we gave the Scenic Rim Regional Council $667,000, and they used it wisely. The council put aside $480,000 of that money towards the Scenic Rim health and hydrotherapy complex. The local people raised an equivalent amount and the council correctly put it aside for that purpose. Just last Sunday, a week ago, I was out there turning the sod on the hydrotherapy complex at Elizabeth Terrace. It was a great day. This was a project that my predecessor, the previous member for Forde, refused to fund during her tenure representing the area. I was there with a shovel, making sure my left foot was on the shovel. Putting his right foot on the shovel was the local mayor, John Brent. He is very well known in the local area and a prominent member of the National Party. Also present was Sel Pfeffer, a prominent member of the Liberal Party. Present at the same time was Aidan McLindon, the new Liberal National Party member for Beaudesert.

Here we have it: a number of prominent Liberal members, National Party members and LNP members—whatever they call themselves in Queensland in this day and age. Here was a prominent member of the National Party, a prominent member of the Liberal Party and the new LNP member for Beaudesert praising the Rudd Labor government by their attendance, and in some cases by their words, for having the commitment to the Scenic Rim area to fund this wonderful project. It seems a bit odd to have these prominent local National Party, Liberal Party and LNP identities present at the time when their comrades, their brethren, their fellow party members opposite, are voting against the very stimulus package that they are there supporting, saying how wonderful it is for the local area of Boonah. There is a great degree of inconsistency there in all the circumstances.

But the funding is not just in those community infrastructure programs. There are other amounts of money that we have poured into the local economy, particularly in areas like Ipswich, where we have seen $600,000 put towards the refurbishment of the Ipswich basketball stadium. There is also $575,000 for the George Alder Tennis Centre and $10 million for the Ipswich CBD redevelopment. Ipswich received almost nothing under the Howard coalition government. It was totally forgotten. The Mayor of Ipswich, Paul Pisasale, has frequently said that he has not seen so much money in his time on the council and that he warmly welcomes the commitment of the Rudd Labor government to the people of Ipswich.

We have also invested $5.1 million in road projects in the local area, but the coalition refused to do it—even for the Warrego Highway, which you will know all about, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, because it goes into your electorate. The LNP member for Lockyer has constantly been going on about the Warrego Highway, but it is the Rudd Labor government that recently committed $8 million and another $2 million for fixing up the Warrego Highway. Did they do anything
about it during their time in office? The coalition failed miserably when it came to road infrastructure in my local area. They simply forgot about it. They simply forgot about Ipswich and the rural areas outside. That is the legacy of the Howard government.

The contribution and the legacy of the Rudd Labor government to Ipswich and the rural areas outside is the commitment to infrastructure, to schools, to roads and to business, because that is what Labor governments do. They commit themselves to nation building in times of adversity and they commit themselves to helping those in need, helping their fellow Australians, cushioning the impact of economic difficulties upon their lives and supporting Ipswich and the rural areas outside. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to Ipswich and the rural areas outside. I commend the bills to the House.

**Mrs Hull (Riverina) (8.19 pm)**—It is a sad case when you sit here and listen to the ramblings of new members of the government when they have been running out opening Investing in Our Schools projects and taking all of the credit for those great projects. They have been running around opening up new projects and new roads and taking all of the credit. I stood on the Sheahan Bridge today after the duplication of that bridge and I watched a wonderful speech by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. He took all the credit for the $78 million for the Sheahan Bridge that most certainly came from the coalition.

I quite enjoyed my day today on the Sheahan Bridge, because it was a great day. It was a great day for Gundagai and it was a great day for the people of Australia. You give some; you take some. I stood there and I listened to Senator Arbib, who came into my schools and opened a project last Friday. He has opened projects on many occasions in my electorate and he has talked about the Rudd government’s infrastructure program—and not $1 of this project on Friday, by the way, was funded by the Rudd government’s programs. It was funded by the last coalition government. But I enjoy those days. I enjoyed having Senator Arbib come and join me to open this great project and take the credit for it, because you know what? It actually happened. When I sit and listen to the amount of almost garbage that is being fired across the chamber day after day saying, ‘You go out there, you put your foot on the shovel and you say how great it is to have your foot on the shovel of this shovel-ready project,’ we seem to be maligned, all day every day, for the number of feet we have on shovels in our electorates.

On the other hand, I have been welcoming Labor to my electorate to open up projects which were funded by the Howard government and for which I fought so hard. I have shown strong advocacy and support for my electorate in getting those projects up and running. In a so-called safe seat, I have fought very hard for that funding, so to be constantly maligned in this place is almost laughable. ‘Ending the blame game’ is all we ever hear about, but the member for Blair has just said that we absolutely destroyed the dental program. But the dental program had not one dollar in the forward estimates. It was a sunset program initiated by former Prime Minister Paul Keating. He said that that program was just an assistance program and would end in four years. By the way, when the Commonwealth dumped their money into the states, the states just withdrew their money, went home and said, ‘Thank you very much’—so we did not actually achieve very much. I get a great kick from being on this side; it is fun to listen to all the groaning and moaning about us having a say. It is as if the government, when
they were in opposition just 18 short months ago, sat on the other side of the House and said absolutely zero—accepted everything and voted for everything and never complained about a thing. But now the shoe is on the other foot, so it feels a bit funny.

But I want to talk about the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2009-2010. There are some good things and some bad things in everything we do, but I want to talk about the changes to the student income support workplace participation criteria—that is, Youth Allowance. It is a major issue for rural and regional students. I have sat in this chamber and listened to the lack of understanding about country kids who have no choice but to leave home to further their education at university. When I hear about the so-called packages that these kids get once they get to university, it is enough to make me very angry on this issue. Our rural and regional kids have as much right to an education as any city kid. We should not be penalised because some city kids, and kids in regional cities where there are universities, are able to access youth allowance and go and live in a flat when their parents earn so much so-called income. My issue is about those kids who sincerely have no choice about living at home and have to leave home.

I was shocked and in disbelief when I read an article in the *Australian*—I think it was a week before the budget was handed down—which outlined the supposed changes to the student income support criteria. It is now apparent that the information that was in the *Australian* was a leak and is actually factual. It is now apparent that the information that was in the *Australian* was a leak and is actually factual. It was a true and factual story but, at the time, I could not believe it. I thought, no, it could not happen; no-one would discriminate against rural students in this way. But it is true. The Rudd government has discriminated against rural students in a way which I think is an absolute disgrace. I could not believe that the government would contemplate making changes which will without doubt inhibit many potential students from accessing the vital support of youth allowance so that they can study at university. A student cannot travel four hours backward and forward every day from Hay to study at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga; they have to live in Wagga Wagga. So they leave home. Accommodation is expensive and paying for it is quite a difficult task for any student.

Since the budget was handed down last week, I have received many calls. I have brought into the chamber with me just a few of the many emails and letters of concern I have received from voters in my electorate who are absolutely stunned that this action is taking place. It has been extremely difficult, though, to pinpoint the finer details of all of the government’s proposed changes. We just have not been able to get enough information to make it really clear exactly what is happening. But the one thing I am most anxious to be told about is how a potential student can access student income support. I have written to the Minister for Education, asking her to outline exactly how a potential student from rural and regional Australia who leaves home can access youth allowance. As I see it, there are two options. They must either come under the family tax benefit A combined income test for both parents or they must establish financial independence in the eyes of Centrelink by gaining at least 30 hours of employment per week for at least 18 months during any period of two years.

But how does a student with no experience in the workforce and no understanding of work initiatives go out and get themselves a basically full-time job when unemployment is skyrocketing? How does that student access 30 hours of work a week, almost full-time employment, for at least 18 months during any period of two years when we have skyrocketing unemployment? My understanding is that you can get it by being mar-
ried, or if you were previously married, or by living in a marriage-like relationship for at least 12 months. So do we say to the kids, ‘Off you go; go out and get married’? Do you have to live in a marriage-like relationship when you are just 17 or 18 to ensure that you are able to get youth allowance so that you can study and get an education at university if you want to? One of the other ways you can get it is by having a dependent child. So do we say to our kids, ‘Go out and have a child and maybe you can get Youth Allowance’?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! It being 8.30 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 34. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

PETITIONS

MRS IRWIN—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, and in accordance with standing order 207, I present the following petitions:

Age Pension

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: The need for the Wanneroo Post Office to be relocated from its current premises to the redeveloped Wanneroo Shopping Centre. The Wanneroo Post Office is currently located in old premises of a poor standard. The car parking is poor and the disabled access is poor which also makes it difficult for the aged and infirm to access the facilities. This is in sharp contrast to the modern facilities of the redeveloped Wanneroo Shopping Centre, where access and parking is state of the art, and where shopping and other services create a hub of services that meet the needs of all local residents.

We therefore ask the House to:

Initiate such actions as to ensure the immediate relocation of the Wanneroo Post Office to the redeveloped Wanneroo Shopping Centre. This relocation will then enable the superior and much improved provision of services and Australia Post products for the disabled, the elderly, the infirm and all other customers who seek such services and products in one central location.

by MRS IRWIN (from 30 citizens)

Byron Bay Declaration

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

This petition of a number of citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the existence of a document known as the Byron Bay Declaration, which was delivered personally into the hands of the Honourable Jenny Macklin, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, on the thirteenth day of February, 2009.

We therefore ask the House to respond openly to all Australians regarding the issues raised in the Declaration, including the undeclared state of war which the Declaration asserts that the Crown has been in since the Crown claimed sovereignty over the Land now known as Australia. Furthermore, we ask that a Treaty be drafted as soon as practicable, to end the war once and for all.

by MRS IRWIN (from 2 citizens)

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:

by MRS IRWIN (from 37 citizens)
Indigenous Australians
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives.

This petition of a number of indigenous (or black-fella) citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to the oldest living culture known to humanity, and to the existence of rites, lores and customs of Indigenous Australians.

We therefore ask the House to, solemnly and sincerely, acknowledge and affirm that said rites, lores and customs have an essential role in the cultural and spiritual heritage of this Land. We also ask that it never be required for anyone to divulge the detail or any specific occurrence of any ceremony of Indigenous Australians, and that if such matters are shared, that they be held in a place of utmost respect, and treated in a matter befitting such respect, in any sphere where this House may exercise its influence.

by Mrs Irwin (from 1 citizen)

Aboriginal Tent Embassy
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the long-standing diplomatic role played by the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra.

We therefore ask the House to recognise the abovementioned Embassy, and in good faith to acknowledge and affirm said Embassy’s rights and responsibilities according to international convention and international law, retrospectively from said Embassy’s establishment.

by Mrs Irwin (from 6 citizens)

Genocide
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of Indian citizens draws attention to:

1. Genocide and other grave Transnational crimes in India, Australia, NZ
2. Masterminded, funded, organized by Australian “Exclusive Brethren” (EB) mafia
3. Against pioneering Indian non-profit research organisation “BOSS School”
4. For its revolutionary belief “Everyone is a Genius”
5. By bribing Indian Government, Judiciary to destroy it
7. BOSS School members to be killed / publicly lynched anytime
8. Applicant (former EB) trafficked to NZ, fled to Australia
9. Thousands of atrocities under Commonwealth, International Laws
10. Violating powerful Treaties signed, ratified by Australia
11. Volumes of direct Documentary, Audio, Video evidence (can be presented)
12. AFP, Federal Court, High Court refusing to take action as per law
13. On the contrary abetting, continuing this Genocide to protect EB

We pray that Commonwealth stops this Genocide, being committed by its citizens:

a. Petition UN, Commonwealth of Nations (Art. 8, Genocide Convention, 1948)
b. Pressurise India to stop the Genocide
c. Direct AFP to prosecute EB as per Criminal Code Act, 1995
d. Initiate worldwide crackdown against EB mafia

Failing which we will approach every international forum:

a. To prosecute Australian citizens, Govt., Judicial officers
b. To expose that like Pakistan, Australia is actively breeding terrorism

by Mrs Irwin (from 2 citizens)

Gaza Strip
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives Assembled In Parliament:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia asks the House to demand of the government of Israel that it must:

1. cease its blockade of Gaza
2. allow free access to Gaza for humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts
3. dismantle the West Bank separation wall
4. stop its ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem and the West Bank

by Mrs Irwin (from 28 citizens)

Toowoomba Bypass Project

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of citizens of Australia who travel in the Toowoomba region draws to the attention of the House the inadequate condition of the Warrego Highway, particularly where it crosses the Great Dividing Range and traverses Toowoomba. The existing range crossing is a significant barrier to efficient freight and passenger transport, having steep grades of up to 10% and tight curves that restrict maximum speeds to only 60 to 80 km/h. As a result, the existing crossing barely copes with continually increasing traffic volumes.

There is no effective way to upgrade the existing crossing, because of the constraints posed by the steep terrain and surrounding urban development.

Through Toowoomba, heavy and small vehicles are currently forced to negotiate 15 sets of traffic lights, with a further six sets expected to be installed shortly. Residents and business operators are concerned about safety, noise, air pollution and general disruption to local traffic.

We ask the House to: immediately commit to funding from the Building Australia Fund for construction of the “Toowoomba Bypass” to:

• improve safety for motorists and heavy vehicle drivers;
• provide an efficient route for the transportation of goods to Brisbane and overseas markets;
• provide a safer alternative to the steep gradient of the current range crossing for drivers of heavy and passenger vehicles;
• create a quicker route to Brisbane or to the west, for those not wanting to travel through Toowoomba;
• reduce traffic movements in Toowoomba city.

by Mrs Irwin (from 1,771 citizens)

Medicare: Dental Treatment

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of low to middle income citizens draws to the attention of the House; the prohibitive cost of dental treatment.

We therefore ask the House to: enable more of the cost of dental treatment to be funded through Medicare.

by Mrs Irwin (from 194 citizens)

Parliament: Lord’s Prayer

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of …

Concerned citizens of Australia draw to the attention of the House: the practice of saying the Lord’s prayer at the beginning of each sitting of our Parliamentary Houses.

We therefore ask the House to take consideration of the following:

We the undersigned as citizens of Australia ask that the use of the LORD’S PRAYER BE RETAINED by Parliament as integral to good government and Australia’s national heritage.

The prayer acknowledges our shared and common humanity under a caring God, in a context of humility and respect;

It asks God to fulfil his just purposes for the earth;

It seeks from God the provision of our daily needs and requires by implication generosity on our part;

It confesses our need to be forgiven and to forgive;

It recognises the lure of corruption and entanglement with evil, from which we need to be delivered;

Finally, it places our lives and actions in an eternal perspective.

Even for those who do not pray to God, the recitation of these words at the beginning of the Parliamentary day allows a few moments for quiet reflection on our shared humanity, our daily de-
pendence on the good things of the earth, our need to forgive and be forgiven, the temptations of office, and the broader perspective against which our efforts must be judged.

Such a time is not wasted.

by Mrs Irwin (from 20 citizens)

Northern Territory: Bilingual Education

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of citizens from Australia and overseas draws the attention of the House to the announcement on October 14th 2008 by the NT Government that from 2009 the ten remaining bilingual programs in the Northern Territory would be effectively closed down.

We believe that

• The NT Government’s decision is educationally unsound, and will hinder the children’s chances of learning good English. It goes against the strong evidence that using a child’s first language fosters greater cognitive development and proficiency in learning through all curriculum areas.

• The decision is demoralising for Indigenous communities who have put over thirty years into promoting and developing teaching methodologies that suit bilingual and bicultural Indigenous children.

• The decision will prejudice the survival of Indigenous languages. The use of the child’s first language also fosters pride in the students’ self esteem and Indigenous identity as recognised in the “Little Children are Sacred” Report.

• The decision goes against the recognition by the United Nations of the right of Indigenous people to provide education in their own languages.

We therefore ask the House to:

Ratify the UN Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in particular to direct the NT Government to comply with Article 14 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Article 14.1:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

by Mrs Irwin (from 771 citizens)

Religious Persecution

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

Your petitioners humbly request the House to support all efforts by Muslims to have the apostasy laws reformed, so that Muslims who chose to leave their faith are no longer liable to any penalty but are free to follow their new convictions without fear, in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We also ask the House to use its influence on Governments of countries where punishments for apostasy are part of the legal system, to encourage abolition.

by Mrs Irwin (from 10 citizens)

Therapeutic Goods Administration

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of concerned community pharmacists and citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: That the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) intends to establish a compulsory website as a source of Consumer Medicine Information (CMI’s) and Product Information (PI’s), and that this website will unnecessarily complicate and duplicate the existing streamlined provision of such information via the dispensing process and integrated with the dispensary software in a community pharmacy. It will make it less likely that consumers of medicines will receive this CMI information on their medications. There is a risk that manufacturers of medicines will discontinue the current distribution system via the dispensary software and the current program of enhancements to the CMIs (e.g. audio, Braille, large print) may be under threat. The establishment of the TGA website as proposed will incur unnecessary expense to taxpayers, and make the provision of CMI’s less likely because of the inability of the website to deliver the information directly to the point at which the medicines are dispensed.
We therefore ask the House to: Urge the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing to direct that the TGA utilise the existing system and that the establishment of any TGA website should not jeopardise the viability of the existing system.

by Mrs Irwin (from 336 citizens)

Permanent Residency
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
Grant of Permanent Residency to New Zealand Citizens Permanently Living in Australia
This petition draws to the attention of the House the (Trans-Tasman agreement of 2001) which determines the eligibility of the grant of Australian Permanent Residency to New Zealand citizens who arrived in Australia on or after 26th February 2001.

Prior to these changes in the Trans Tasman agreement New Zealand citizens who arrived in Australia would receive permanent residency and on application would be granted Australian Citizenship after two years.

It should be noted that, according to DIMIA data, only a few hundred have only applied for Australian Permanent Residency and as 30 June 2008, an estimated 521,200 New Zealand citizens were present in Australia. www.immi.gov.au/factsheets/17nz.htm.

It is recommended that the main criteria to be used to grant New Zealand Citizens Permanent Residency in Australia is that the main applicant should have been in full time employment for 2 years and also have a property under his/ her name.

We therefore ask the Australian House of Representatives to amend the relevant legislation and grant Australian Permanent Residency to those New Zealand Citizens permanently settled in Australia.

by Mrs Irwin (from 727 citizens)

Child Support Scheme
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
The petition of concerned citizens of Australia Draws to the attention of the House:

The new Child Support Scheme isn’t fair for parents who has their children on school holidays. For us it would be 0-13% child support care percentage, 0-51 nights a year, 1 night fortnight care level Nil care, child support cost percentage is Nil. Cost Percentage reflects the cost we incur when we provide care for our children, for example accommodation, food, entertainment etc, us paying parents cost percentage is Nil. We do meet cost directly through care on school holidays and special occasions. What really hurts is expenses, we have to say no to our children if they want to go to the park, movies etc as we can’t afford it. There’s other paying parents who can’t afford to see their children due to expenses. There are paying parents who pays Child Support and they are not allowed to have any contact with their children, there is not a reasonable reason.

We therefore ask the House to:
Please make it more fair for paying parents who has care of their children on school holiday and special occasions due to living in different towns or states. Why should we be any different from other paying parents and don’t make us pay the price because we see our children on holidays. Please help parents who pays Child Support for their children, they are not allowed to have any contact with

by Mrs Irwin (from 1 citizen)

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme: Avastin
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
This petition from concerned residents of the Central Coast request consideration be given to add AVASTIN®, a cancer drug, to the PBS Scheme.

The present cost(s) to the patient, family and community for ongoing and protracted medical, hospital and nursing needs far outweigh the costs and benefits of AVASTIN® being added to the PBS.

by Mrs Irwin (from 727 citizens)

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:
Petition,
We the undersigned request that the Australian government adjust the CPRS so that the number of pollution permits is reduced each year directly in line with the amount of pollution saved by voluntary action.

by Mrs Irwin (from 61 citizens)

**Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme**

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

Petition,

We the undersigned request that the Australian government adjust the CPRS to acknowledge that the only safe target is 350ppm—as recommended by leading climate scientists.

by Mrs Irwin (from 68 citizens)

**Debt to Commonwealth**

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: that a woman whose innocence has been confirmed in the South Australian Supreme Court is in danger of having her home seized by the Commonwealth.

We therefore ask the House to pass a resolution to request that the Finance Minister, the Honourable Member for Melbourne, Mr. Lindsay Tanner, immediately waive the debt owed the Commonwealth.

by Mrs Irwin (from 1,271 citizens)

**Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam**

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

THIS PETITION OF: Certain Citizens of Australia DRAWS TO THE ATTENTION OF THE HOUSE:

During public demonstrations held recently in Australian cities, supporters of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) have publicly displayed provocative and unpleasant artefacts and flags depicting:

- use of child soldiers, suicide bombings in crowded places
- assassination of elected national leaders.

Displaying the portrait of Interpol wanted LTTE leader in his paramilitary attire associated with bloodshed and violence is insensitive and highly provocative to peaceful Australians.

The LTTE flag of the severed tiger head with two guns and bullets defy norms acceptable to a decent society.

Australia houses a large number of people with Sri Lankan origin who have suffered firsthand or have gone through the suffering of their loved ones due to LTTE atrocities.

Demonstrations using such insensitive artefacts lead to arousal of racial intolerance in a peace loving society. These actions might lead to backlashes like Serbian-Bosnian clash, Cronulla 2005 incident and Parramatta Synagogue attack 2006. Most importantly, these actions cause a section of peace loving Australians to suffer in silence.

This type of behaviour is not in line with promoting multicultural harmony in our society.

by Mrs Irwin (from 569 citizens)

Petitions received.

**Responses**

Mrs Irwin—Ministerial responses to petitions previously presented to the House have been received as follows:

**Gaza Strip**

Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 26 February 2009, regarding a petition recently submitted by the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils for consideration by the Standing Committee on Petitions. This letter responds to the petition, as required by Standing Order 209(b).

The petition is in support of an immediate ceasefire to the conflict in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel. As you would be aware, on 18 January Israel and Hamas declared unilateral ceasefire. The Government welcomed the cease-fires, but remains concerned by and condemns ongoing Palestinian rocket attacks into Israel.
The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and I have all condemned Hamas’s acts of aggression, including the firing of over 300 rockets into southern Israel which precipitated the conflict. This was entirely appropriate. At the same time, the Government called on both Israel and Hamas to halt the violence. Throughout the conflict, the Government urged all parties to avoid actions which caused suffering to civilians, and consistently called on Israel to meet its humanitarian obligations to ensure the people of the Gaza Strip had access to basic necessities and humanitarian assistance.

The Australian Government shares the petitioners’ concern at the conflict and its impact on civilians. The Government fully supported United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1860, which called for an immediate, durable and fully-respected cease-fire. Ongoing violence has undermined the importance of consolidating current arrangements into such a cease-fire. Consistent with UNSCR 1860, this will need to involve an end to arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip and rocket attacks on Israel, and the opening of border crossings into the Gaza Strip. The Government fully supports ongoing negotiations in Cairo to this end.

The Government also recognises that the provision of humanitarian relief to the population of the Gaza Strip is an urgent priority. On 2 March, the Parliamentary Secretary for International Developmental Assistance, Mr Bob McMullan, attended the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, in Sharm el-Sheikh, as Prime Minister Rudd’s Special Envoy. At the Conference, Mr McMullan announced that Australia would contribute $20 million to assist the efforts of the Palestinian Authority, as well as United Nations (UN) agencies and other donors, to meet the recovery and reconstruction needs of the Palestinian people.

This assistance was in addition to the $10 million which Australia committed in January for emergency and humanitarian relief in the Gaza Strip. The Australian Government has now provided $75 million in assistance to the Palestinian people since the end of 2007.

The conflict highlights that a lasting resolution to the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank can only be brought about through peaceful means. The Australian Government remains committed to supporting a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own state, and Israel’s right to live in peace within secure borders.

Yours sincerely
from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith, to a petition presented on 23 February 2009 by Mrs Irwin (from 1337 citizens)

Waterfall Gully Road

Mrs Irwin
Thank you for your letter dated 26 February 2009 about a petition submitted for the Committee’s consideration regarding an upgrade of Waterfall Gully Road in South Australia.

Waterfall Gully Road is a state arterial road and, as such, the responsibility for the development and upgrade of this road lies with the South Australian Government. I have, therefore, forwarded a copy of your correspondence to the South Australian Minister for Transport, the Hon Patrick Conlon MP for his consideration.

However, in response to the petition, I would note that the Australian Government has committed $1.7 billion towards land transport infrastructure in South Australia under the Government’s Nation Building Program (2009-10 to 2013-14). These funds will be used for substantial projects on the National Land Transport Network and for Roads to Recovery, boom gates, black spots and heavy vehicle safety and productivity projects.

Thank you for raising this matter. Yours sincerely
from the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Albanese, to a petition presented on 23 February 2009 by Mrs Irwin (from 145 citizens)

Millennium Development Goals

Mrs Irwin
Thank you for your letters of 26 February 2009 on behalf of the Holy Family Catholic Church of
Menai and the Western Heights Uniting Church of Herne Hill, regarding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). You may wish to draw upon the following in your reply.

Australia’s international development assistance strongly contributes towards the achievement of the MDGs. This commitment to the MDGs was commended in December 2008 when Australia’s aid program was reviewed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD welcomed Australia’s renewed commitment to reduce poverty, promote the MDGs and support international agencies like the United Nations.

The vast majority of Australia’s official development assistance (ODA) contributes either directly or indirectly towards MDG progress. Australia is playing its role in global efforts to accelerate progress towards the MDGs by increasing the level of ODA to 0.5 per cent of gross national income (GNI) by 2015-16. The Government retains the target of 0.7 per cent of GNI as an aspirational goal.

Through concrete support for the MDGs, Australia is contributing towards global efforts to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

Health is an important focus of the Australian Government’s aid program, with expenditure of over $440 million in 2008-09 making up approximately 13 per cent of the total aid program.

At a high level event on the MDGs in New York in September 2008 the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, committed Australia to spend $250 million over the next four years to improve women’s and children’s health, with a focus on Asia-Pacific countries where maternal and child mortality remain high. Australia will work with governments, international agencies and non-government organisations, to increase access to cost-effective life-saving interventions for women and children through strengthened health systems. Between now and 2015 health will remain one of the aid program’s priorities.

In relation to debt relief, the Government participates in a number of international debt relief initiatives including Paris Club debt rescheduling, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI) and arrears clearance. Under the HIPC Initiative, debt relief is provided when a country has a proven track-record of reforms ensuring that debt relief is used for poverty reduction. Australia has committed to provide 100 per cent bilateral debt forgiveness for countries that qualify for this initiative. The MDRI provides 100 per cent debt relief from the International Monetary Fund and the concessional arms of the World Bank and the African Development Bank to developing countries that have completed the HIPC Initiative. Arrears clearance is provided to those countries with improved political and economic environments that are unable to clear the large amounts of overdue loan payments they owe to the World Bank and/or the IMF.

Further information on how Australia’s aid program is contributing to the MDGs is available from the Australian Agency for International Development’s web site at www.ausaid.gov.au.

I hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely

from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith

Mrs Irwin
Funding of SBS

Thank you for your letter dated 26 February 2009 and attached petition concerning funding for the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).

SBS is one of Australia’s most important public institutions. The Australian Government recognises the importance of maintaining SBS as an independent and comprehensive national public broadcaster, catering for diverse interests in the Australian community.

Under the Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991, the principal Charter function of SBS is to provide multilingual and multicultural radio and television services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia’s multicultural society. It is an important means of exposing audiences to the widest possible range of cultures and
perspectives, fostering understanding and acceptance of the diversity of the Australian people.

The Government is committed to ensuring adequate funding to SBS on a triennial basis to enable it to provide Australians with high-quality broadcasting services, free from political interference.

New funding proposals, including any request for additional radio services, will be considered during SBS’s Triennial Funding Review, which will also consider the efficiency and performance of the national broadcaster. Triennial Funding Submissions from both the SBS and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) will be considered in the context of the forthcoming Budget.

In October 2008, the Government released a public discussion paper aimed at stimulating ideas and comments about the future roles of SBS and the ABC. It is intended that this process will also inform the Government’s future policy and funding decisions in relation to the two broadcasters.

Thank you for bringing this important matter to my attention. Yours sincerely

from the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, to a petition presented on 23 February 2009 by Mrs Irwin (from 868 citizens)

Rent Assistance

Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2008 to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP about the Rent Assistance petition received by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions. As Rent Assistance is in my area of responsibility, I am replying. I apologise for the lengthy delay in responding. Please extend my apologies to the Committee.

As you know, Rent Assistance is a non-taxable income supplement payable to eligible Australian residents who rent accommodation in the private rental market. In order to receive Rent Assistance, a customer must:

- qualify for a social security income support payment; or
- qualify for more than the base rate of Family Tax Benefit A; or
- qualify for a service pension; and
- must pay a minimum amount of rent, called the rent threshold.

Rent Assistance is then paid at the rate of 75 cents for each dollar above the rent threshold up to a maximum rate. Rent Assistance rates are based on a customer’s family situation and the amount of rent they pay. Rent Assistance thresholds and maximum rates are reviewed every March and September in line with the cost of living.

The Australian Government is very concerned about significant increases in rents in many parts of Australia. Rapid rent increases are happening mainly because there is a shortage of homes to rent. Vacancy rates are at or below 2 per cent in most capital cities, which is below what economists say is needed for a healthy market. While increasing Rent Assistance would provide additional assistance to eligible customers, it is only a short term solution because it does not address housing supply problems. There is also a significant risk that landlords may in turn increase rents, as the lack of supply reduces effective choice for low and middle income renters.

The real solution is structural - we need to increase the number of affordable rental properties on the market. The Australian Government recognises that current market forces are insufficient to lift construction rates at the low end of the market, and that we have a significant legacy problem from the former government, resulting from inadequate policy and funding in regard to affordable housing.

As you know, the Rudd Government has committed more than $7.5 billion in new funding to build affordable housing, including accommodation for people who are homeless. This includes capital funding to build 20,000 new public and community housing dwellings as part of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, and $400 million under the Social Housing National Partnership Agreement for up to 2,100 new public and community housing dwellings.

In addition, the establishment of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) will see 50,000 affordable rental homes built over the next
four years. NRAS homes are available to people relying on social security payments such as aged and disability pensioners and Newstart recipients, as well as working people earning moderate incomes. All of these properties are required to be rented at below market rates (20 per cent reduction off the market rate), and renters will remain eligible for Rent Assistance.

For example, if the market rate for a three bedroom house is $400 a week, a three bedroom house built under the National Rental Affordability Scheme will be rented at $320 a week, to tenants who need affordable housing. Tenants may also be eligible for Rent Assistance—making the homes even more affordable.

The Scheme works by giving institutional investors and housing providers a financial incentive to invest in affordable rental homes over the next four years.

The first round of allocation will build 2,800 homes across the country. People have already moved into more than 150 homes with almost 700 more becoming available before 30 June 2009. Thousands more properties will become available over the next 18 months.

The incentives that are being offered as part of the first round of this important initiative will help to build a range of different dwellings—apartments, townhouses and houses. This will ensure the accommodation needs of families, key workers, seniors and other low income households are better catered for.

The Government is optimistic that the implementation of these initiatives will provide some relief to the pressure that currently exists in the private rental market.

Once again, thank you for writing. Yours sincerely

from the Minister for Housing, Ms Plibersek, to a petition presented on 22 October 2008 by Ms Marino (from 483 citizens)

Statements

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.33 pm)—This is the first opportunity since 16 March for petitions to be presented in my capacity as Chair of the Standing Committee on Petitions. On that date, I advised the House of a public hearing which was to be held the following week at the Central Coast, at the Entrance Campus of the Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College. I would like to use the time remaining to me this evening to speak about the success of that public hearing and the ongoing work of the committee.

As part of its rolling program of hearings into petitions presented, the committee had planned to speak with principal petitioners from New South Wales. It was the second time that the committee took evidence outside Canberra. The committee decided to hold the meeting on the Central Coast, in the hope that as many petitioners from northern parts of New South Wales would be able to attend.

With some assistance, I should say ‘great assistance’, not only from the office of the member for Dobell—and I am happy to see him in the chamber this evening—but also from him personally—he has a passion for his electorate—arrangements were made with the principal of the Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College, Mr Andrew Newman. The college has three campuses in different locations across the Central Coast, and Mr Newman is responsible for all three. The committee was indeed fortunate for his assistance in providing the venue for a great day of hearings.

Throughout the course of the day, the committee was able to speak not only with principal petitioners but with staff and students of the secondary college and several other schools in the area. These schools were: all three campuses of Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College, Holgate Public School, Berkeley Vale Public School, Jilliby Public School, Killarney Vale Public School, St Cecilia’s Catholic Primary School, Wamberal Public School and Chittaway Bay Public
School. The committee learned as much from these wonderful, wonderful students as the students may have learned from the committee members present that day.

I would like to express my thanks to Deputy Speaker Russell Broadbent for his deft microphone work in his ‘Master of Ceremonies’ role as Speaker in the parliamentary question and answer session we held. I would also like to thank my committee colleagues who were present for their good humour and willingness to participate in the light-hearted as well as the serious discussions about our work with petitions and as parliamentarians more generally.

Feedback from the school kids and others present at The Entrance on 23 March was extremely positive. A common reaction, which I am sure most parliamentarians are familiar with because of the work done on committees, was: ‘We can’t believe you all get on so well!’

As I have said on other occasions in this place, the committee takes its role as promoters of the importance of petitions and parliamentary democracy very seriously. We welcome the chance to speak directly with petitioners about their concerns. We also hope to be able to visit more schools in future public hearings, as we listen to petitioners around Australia.

If I could be allowed a little indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson: I know that it is not in my line as chair of the petitions committee, but I would like this evening to welcome to the federal parliament of Australia some members of my extended family: two wonderful men, Carl and Kim Irwin; Kim’s partner, Helen; and Carl’s partner, Kate. Many years have gone by since we have spent time together and it is wonderful that our paths have been able to cross again this evening in the people’s parliament. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Committees
Economics Committee
Report
Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (8.38 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, I present the committee’s report entitled Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2008 (first report), together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, I have pleasure in presenting the committee’s report entitled Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2008 (first report). Mr Deputy Speaker, when it became apparent that the global economic outlook was worsening in September last year, the Reserve Bank of Australia board took its first steps to reduce the cash rate. Between September 2008 and April 2009 the official cash rate was reduced six times, a total decrease of 425 basis points since 3 September 2008.

It is clear now that the global economy is in a severe recession. In the April 2009 World Economic Outlook, the International Monetary Fund projected that global activity would contract by 1.3 per cent in 2009. The IMF noted that this was the ‘deepest post-World War II recession by far’. Australia’s economy has been impacted by the deterioration in international economic conditions, which have substantially slowed growth. The Governor of the RBA, in his statement announcing the 5 May rate decision, noted that the ‘Australian economy contracted in the latter part of 2008, and this has continued in 2009 to date, with both domestic and international demand weaker.’ The governor also noted that monetary policy has eased significantly and that the ‘stance of monetary policy, together with the substantial fiscal initia-
tives, will provide significant support to domestic demand over the period ahead.’

During the hearing, the committee asked how important it had been for governments, both in the Australian context and globally, to implement various fiscal responses to the global credit crisis and for central banks to loosen the ties on monetary policy. The RBA governor answered that tremendous turmoil and instability in the global financial market and a large contraction of G7 GDP required ‘a response by policy makers to the turmoil itself in order to stabilise the financial system and stop that spiralling down any further.’ When asked about the consequences for the Australian economy if the government had not implemented a fiscal stimulus package, the governor stated:

I do not think we would be seeing too many consequences of that right now. They would be coming later. The policy expansion cannot really head off whatever is happening in the economy today; it does not work that fast. But later in the year we are going to be seeing more and more effects of those measures. That is when we would have seen the impact of a different course of action. The economy, I think, would have been considerably weaker than it will be had that course of action been followed.

Clearly, the governor was endorsing in very broad terms the approach that this government took in the fiscal stimulus packages at the end of last year and earlier this year.

The IMF has projected that output in Australia will decline moderately in 2009 before picking up in 2010. While Australia’s economy has slowed, it is the RBA’s view that, comparatively, the economic downturn has not been as severe as in other advanced economies. However, these are the worst global economic conditions seen for over half a century and there is still considerable uncertainty about the economic outlook. It is therefore more critical than ever for the committee to scrutinise the RBA on its key forecasts for economic growth, inflation and employment.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Mr Glenn Stevens, and the other representatives of the RBA, for appearing at the hearing on 20 February. They provided thoughtful and very open responses to the questions that were put to them by the committee. The next hearing will be on 14 August 2009 in Sydney. I commend the report to the House.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (8.42 pm)—I join with the chairman in making some comments about this report, Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2008 (first report). The Reserve Bank plays an important role in the management of the Australian economy. Along with the Treasury it is one of the major sources of official advice to the people of Australia and to the government about the state of the economy and its future prospects. Unlike the Treasury, it is an independent body. As the Secretary of the Treasury, Ken Henry, conceded in his post-budget address:

The Treasury Department is a department of state. It is part of the executive government. It works to the government of the day, whatever the political persuasion of the government of the day. And so in that sense of course the Treasury is not independent from government and it can never behave as if it is independent from government.

Mr Henry added:

… the Treasury conducts its analysis without government interference.

But the reality is that the department serves the Treasurer and the government of the day.

This is important in the current discussion concerning the future forecasts about the Australian economy and, importantly, prospective growth. In the budget the Treasurer has projected real GDP to be minus half of one per cent in 2009-10, rising to 2¼ per cent in 2010-11 and then 4½ per cent in the
following years. Indeed, Treasury predicts six successive years of growth of four per cent plus—and I will return to this forecast shortly.

By contrast the Reserve Bank is more cautious. It forecasts growth, for example, at 1¼ per cent in June 2010, 2½ per cent in December 2010 and 3¼ per cent in June 2011. The CPI predictions also vary significantly, with the RBA forecasting higher levels than the Treasury. The International Monetary Fund also thinks the Treasury forecasts are too optimistic.

Why is this important? The government wants the Australian people to believe there is a road to recovery from the massive deficits and debt to which they have committed the Commonwealth. Let me remind the House of them: a $58 billion deficit next year, leading to a $300 billion debt. How this vast borrowing is to be repaid is of vital interest to Australians who are concerned that they, and their children, will be repaying it for a generation or more. The government’s projections of growth are therefore significant. But are they believable?

The government wants us to believe that Australia will enjoy six successive years of more than four per cent growth. Let me put this in context. Albert Einstein once said: The future is an unknown, but a somewhat predictable unknown. To look to the future we must first look backwards to the past. That is where the seeds of the future were planted.

The past is revealing. Six years of more than four per cent growth is unprecedented. Even through the boom years, Australia did not achieve this outcome. Indeed the Treasury secretary has to go back to the 1960s to justify his assessment.

Huge restraint will be required in the future, given the massive global stimulus that governments have promoted. Then there are other significant cost burdens on Australia, not the least of which is the proposed carbon trading scheme. The Minister for Finance and Deregulation has conceded that forecasting is difficult and there is a margin for error. This underestimates the situation. The Governor of the Reserve Bank said:

…it is actually the case now that, if we are honest, there is tremendous uncertainty around any point number. That means that in thinking about policy you should be thinking about not just the central forecast but what the risks are either side and how to respond to them.

Moreover, the Treasury’s past projections have also been shown to be wrong. In these circumstances, what store can we place on them today? What is happening today is the history upon which tomorrow’s forecasts are constructed.

Further projections out to 2020 are, almost by definition, unreliable. As a number of former Treasury officials have said in the past week, there is considerable uncertainty about such figures. The Treasury secretary once shared this view. In February, he told a Senate committee that net debt projections are ‘no better than crude assumptions about macroeconomic aggregates’.

The Reserve Bank thus serves an important function as an alternative source of advice to the Treasury. This, however, is not the Reserve Bank’s primary role. The primary role of the Reserve Bank is directed to monetary policy. Nonetheless, it serves an important function by providing a counterpoint to Treasury, as the events of the last few weeks underscore.

At the present time we do not know what the future is, but we should not be wishing for it. Wishing for the future will not create it. If the Reserve Bank is correct, then the future will be much more uncertain than the government wants us to believe. That will be a worry for us all. *(Time expired)*
Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (8.47 pm)—I move:
That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Economics Committee Report: Referral to Main Committee
Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (8.48 pm)—I move:
That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

Family, Community, Housing and Youth Committee Report
Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (8.48 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, I present the committee’s report, incorporating additional comments, entitled Who cares...? Report on the inquiry into better support for carers, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS—I am very pleased to present this report, Who cares...?, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth. Just over 12 months ago, the committee received a referral to inquire into the challenges facing carers and their support needs.

The basic questions were: what can we do to ensure that carers get the recognition they deserve, and how can we ensure that carers get the practical support they so desperately need? To answer these questions, the committee was keen to hear from the experts—that is, from carers themselves. And carers responded.

The committee received over 1,300 written submissions. The majority of these came from carers. Additionally, over 250 witnesses gave evidence at public hearings held across Australia. It is thanks to the generosity and the candour of so many carers that the committee was able to gain an insight into their daily lives. As I said just recently, they allowed us to see into their homes and their lives in a most intimate way.

Over decades, the shift from institutional care to care in the community, along with continual gains in medical science, has increased society’s reliance on care provided by family and friends. As a result, pressures on support systems for carers have been building and, with an ageing population, these pressures are projected to increase.

There are already an estimated 2.5 million carers in Australia. Of these, almost half a million are primary carers. We know that, as a group, carers are seriously disadvantaged financially, are frequently socially isolated and have one of the lowest levels of collective wellbeing. In view of these facts, one might ask why anyone would become a carer. The answer is that becoming a carer is not really a choice. In anyone’s life, at any time, they can be thrust into the role without warning. Some people find themselves in this situation after the birth of a child with an illness or disability. Others become carers following a traumatic event or accident involving a loved one. And, while every caring situation is unique, in essence what carers
want are choices—choices about their lives and the lives of their families.

With this in mind, the committee has made 50 recommendations to assist carers. Key recommendations include: increasing financial assistance for carers; providing adequate access to quality services which will allow carers to have time out of the caring role; and streamlining the current maze of carer support systems. To provide immediate financial relief to carers, the committee has recommended increasing the base rate of carer payments and reviewing the means testing thresholds. In the longer term, the committee has also recommended restructuring financial assistance given to carers to better reflect the level of care provided. The committee has also recommended an urgent increase in the supply of community care services. This is particularly aimed at respite care services and in-home or domestic assistance.

The complex and fragmented service systems are a source of confusion and frustration for many carers. To address this, the committee supports reforms being undertaken by the Council of Australian Governments to provide service systems that are seamless. The committee has also made specific recommendations to encourage nationally consistent and streamlined supports and services for carers.

Obviously, although government is yet to make a formal response to this report, the recent federal budget includes measures which indicate government’s support for carers. Notably, carer payment recipients will receive the pension increases announced in the pension reform package. For a single carer receiving the full carer payment, this will provide an additional $32.49 a week. Also, to replace the one-off bonuses for carers the government has introduced a permanent carer supplement. The supplement will provide $600 per annum for carer payment recipients and an additional $600 per annum for carer allowance recipients for each eligible person in their care. While these budget measures are a welcome start, I hope that the recommendations contained in the Who cares …? report will provide a robust platform to progress the reform agenda for carers into the future. I also hope that this is the beginning of an attitudinal shift across the whole community, a shift which will answer the question ‘Who cares?’ with the response that we all do.

In concluding, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to the deputy chair, the member for Pearce, to members of the committee and to all the carers and organisations who have contributed to this inquiry. We have endeavoured to make this report your report. I would also like to thank members of the committee and the secretariat for their efforts throughout the inquiry process, in particular James Catchpole, Alison Clegg and Siobhan Carrigan, supported by Leila Jordan, Belinda Zolotto, Gaye Milner and Tarran Snape. I commend the report to the House.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (8.53 pm)—I am pleased to join the chair of the committee in addressing the issues in relation to this inquiry. Depressed, desperate and isolated—when we asked carers how they described their role that is what many of them had to say. There were common concerns amongst carers regardless of what kind of caring role they undertook. They were united by their problems and the challenges that they faced. Not enough is being done to care for carers. That was the clear message that came out of this inquiry. The 50 recommendations made in our report, Who cares …?, represents their many stories, but our response cannot finish there. These recommendations are empty promises if they are not acted upon. Along with the chair, I look forward to receiving the
government’s response to this inquiry and to the recommendations.

As deputy chair of the committee, like the chair and other members of the committee, I was personally touched by the stories of ordinary Australians doing what can only be described as an extraordinary job of caring. Their lives and their challenges are inextricably linked to those they care for. It became clear that there is simply not enough assistance to go around. Time and time again the committee heard stories from carers who were under extreme financial or emotional stress. It is intolerable that those who give up so much to care for others should be subject to such pressures. Financial hardship is a major ongoing concern for many carers, and the report recommends a significant increase in the base rate of carer payments. We have also asked that the Treasurer consider easing the tax burden of carers. It is no wonder that carers are under financial stress, as any payments they receive may be quickly consumed by specialist medical services, medication and/or equipment required by those they care for.

Financial isolation of carers is further exacerbated by employment difficulties. Currently there are significant disincentives for carers to earn supplementary income because it is quickly, at quite a ferocious rate, taken from them. This report recommends that these disincentives are eliminated to allow carers an opportunity for a greater standard of living, independence and the ability to accumulate savings or superannuation. Many carers also reported a lack of flexible working arrangements, which hinders their ability to engage in the workforce. That further socially isolates this group of people. The report recommends that the right to request flexible workings arrangements be extended to accommodate carers.

Carers should be able to look to the future with at least some degree of certainty. The unavailability of accommodation for both carers and those they care for, particularly parents in the older category who are still caring for members of the family, is a concern. They are afraid of dying and of not having anywhere to put those family members. It is a significant issue. Commonly these carers ask, ‘Who will look after the person I am caring for if something happens to me?’ Many older carers experience that not unrealistic concern or anxiety. A dramatic increase in funding is required so that accommodation is available for those that need it the most.

I know that the government has put aside money for social housing and it is my belief, and I think that I attached that to the addendum to the report, that some of that money should be directed to this group of people, who are deeply concerned about what will happen to the person they care for when they fall sick or pass away. As I said, it is not an unrealistic concern or anxiety. Clearly there is considerable work to be done.

I would like to thank the committee chair for the very professional way in which the hearings were conducted and to all members of the committee for their contributions. This report asked the question: who cares? If we are to answer: ‘We care,’ then we need to confront head-on the issues facing carers, match rhetoric with the reality and exercise our political will to ensure a better future for carers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—Does the member for Canberra wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (8.58 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Family, Community, Housing and Youth Committee

Report: Referral to Main Committee

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (8.59 pm)—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

Migration Committee

Report

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (9.00 pm)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, I present the committee’s report, incorporating a dissenting report, additional comments and a minority report, entitled Immigration detention in Australia: community based alternatives to detention, together with the minutes of the proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr DANBY—In presenting this second report of the committee into immigration detention in Australia I note that a majority of the committee are extremely pleased that the government has already taken steps to respond to the committee’s recommendations in its first report on immigration detention, which was tabled in December. Recommendation 18 of that report recommended that the government introduce legislation to waive all detention charges and debt. The government responded swiftly to that recommendation by introducing the Migration Amendment (Abolishing Detention Debt) Bill 2009 in the Senate on 18 March.

The report we are considering now was completed before the Treasurer delivered the budget speech on 12 May, which decided to vote in favour of $14 million for the assisted voluntary return program, which encourages and facilitates those found not to meet the criteria for entry to Australia to return home. There is also more money for programs to assist those granted asylum to adjust. The committee acknowledges that this is one of many welcome changes to government policy on immigration detention; however, despite the changes to both policy and administrative culture in recent times, we must do better.

The committee has, therefore, chosen to focus this report on the conditions and material support for release into the community, including appropriate options for community based alternatives to secure detention. The report recognises that secure detention will continue to play an important role in our immigration system. It forms an integral part of our robust immigration system. However, co-located, open residential accommodation in the community can provide people with a safe environment whilst still being accessible to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and other service providers. Community based alternatives can also be much more cost-effective than the current high levels of physical security or on-site staffing required within immigration detention centres.

The committee’s first report explored the potential damage of long-term detention on people. The harsh psychological burden inflicted by long and indefinite periods of detention, as well as restrictions on income, work and health care for community based bridging visa holders, is known to have harmful effects on those involved. The report supports people who lawfully come to Australia, as well as those who have fled their native land seeking asylum, invests in case
management and actively seeks an expected immigration outcome. That is why the committee has recommended that the Australian government reform the bridging visa framework to comprehensively support those released into the community, with appropriate reporting or surety requirements.

The committee recommends that the government utilise the reformed bridging visa framework in lieu of community detention until a person’s immigration status is resolved and review the cases of those currently on residence determinations. The committee has also recommended that there be improved transparency in immigration decision making, improved access to legal advice and improved access to voluntary return counselling to help individuals decide what is going to be the best and most realistic outcome for them and their families.

The committee recognises that there are basic rights, such as access to appropriate health care and housing, which should be afforded to all people regardless of their immigration status. The committee recommends that the Australian government, where needed, provide basic income assistance that is means tested, access to necessary health care, assistance in sourcing appropriate temporary accommodation and community orientation information. In addition, it recommends that children be provided with safe and appropriate accommodation with their parents or guardians and basic necessities such as adequate food and primary and secondary schooling. Lastly, the committee is concerned that our reliance on the private rental market as an alternative to immigration detention facilities is inadequate and inefficient and is recommending that the Australian government have access to a stock of community based immigration housing.

I would like to express my appreciation to the hardworking members of the committee. I also note that, despite considerable effort to achieve consensus, a number of minority reports have been generated. Of particular note is the extraordinary diversity of opinion displayed by members of the opposition. The member for Murray, having supported the committee’s endorsement of Labor’s detention policy in December 2008, has now for reasons of political expediency, I would judge, refused to endorse this report and has written her own report. The other members of the opposition have, however, failed to follow the opposition spokesperson on immigration.

The deputy chair of the committee, the member for Hughes, has endorsed the report, and I thank her for that. The member for Kooyong has gone in another direction, tabling his own dissenting report, which I am sure he will speak about, that is poles apart from that of the shadow minister. Senator Fierravanti-Wells joined the committee late and failed to endorse the committee’s report or four dissenting reports. There were four opposition members and there are four positions! This report provides recommendations forming part of a framework which will maintain Australia’s border security while ensuring unauthorised arrivals and other immigrants are treated humanely.

Dr STONE (Murray) (9.05 pm)—I have submitted a minority report to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration’s second report into future options for additional community based detention alternatives. The committee established three considerations to inform its assessment of community based detention alternatives. These considerations are that community based detention must ensure a humane, appropriate and supportive living environment for those awaiting resolution of their immigration status; that it should maintain a robust and enforceable immigra-
tion system that operates with integrity throughout arrival, assessment, resettlement or departure processes for unlawful noncitizens; and that the alternatives must be cost-effective and appropriate value for money.

These considerations, as well as the surging wave of unauthorised arrivals since the softening of government policy in August 2008, informed my response to the inquiry. Since then we have seen 20 boats with over 782 asylum seekers on board. The recommendations made in this report would undoubtedly be seen as a further softening of this government’s response to people smugglers and their clients that would expose even more to injury and death. For this and other reasons I will explain I do not support the new bridging framework which is articulated in particular in recommendations 2, 3, 8 and 10 in the report. In my considered opinion the proposed new bridging visa framework does not comprehensively meet the agreed report considerations and criteria nor does it help to deter people smugglers from targeting Australia as a preferred destination.

Recommendations 2, 3 and 8 describe the majority of the committee’s view that unlawful noncitizens should be diverted out of detention before their security, health and identification status checks are completed. These ex-detainees would then be transferred into the community within a so-called bridging visa framework. The entitlements and support to accompany the bridging visas are described in recommendation 8. They include basic income assistance that is means tested, health care, sourcing temporary accommodation and basic furnishings, information about tenancy rights and responsibilities, and community orientation information.

Recommendation 10 proposes that these bridging visa holders would also have work rights. As unemployment continues to climb, it cannot be assured that asylum seekers can readily step into and keep employment. Looking for work with broken English, qualification recognition problems and no ability to indicate a long-term stay in the job would make it extremely difficult for someone to gain a job. Alternatively, placing the person on welfare could colour their future attitudes to finding work in Australia and earning an independent living in what will continue to be a very difficult economic climate.

As well, most detainees do not stay for long periods in secure detention, and all detention centres have been upgraded or have been recently funded for further upgrades. The committee took evidence that, as at 1 May 2009, 47 per cent of stays in detention were for less than one month, with 72.1 per cent of the stays for periods of less than three months. Processing times for those in the most recent smuggling episodes are being shortened all the time.

We heard compelling evidence from a number of people who worked to support detainees released partway through their processing into the community that increased use of bridging visas without a substantially enhanced provision of support may result in some people being no better off, or even worse off, than in immigration detention. Given the severe reductions in staffing and funding now applying to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, including some 600 fewer staff since the 2008-09 budget, it is important that the remaining resources are not diverted from efficiently and swiftly finalising the identity, health and security status of individuals in detention. If detainees were consigned for a very long time to the grey no-man’s-land of a bridging visa with no swift resolution of their status, this would not represent an improvement on the current situation. The department’s support, oversight and monitoring of those on bridging visas, the surety requirements and the regular
personal reporting requirements for those on bridging visas would be resource intensive and debilitating for those locked into this status limbo.

It is also more likely under the new framework proposal that every rejected asylum seeker claim would lead to an administrative, ministerial and judicial challenge to this decision—whatever was possible. If the detainee understood that their time—whether months or years—in the appeals process would be spent in the community with full work or income support and other rights, substantially more time would be wasted in dealing with vexatious claims, and money that would otherwise be committed to better settling refugees into our country would be diverted into dealing with these vexatious claims. *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—Does the member for Melbourne Ports wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (9.10 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39(c), the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Migration Committee

Report: Referral to Main Committee

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (9.10 pm)—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Equal Rights and Opportunities

Mr GEORGIOU (Kooyong) (9.10 pm)—

I move:

That the House:

(1) reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and opportunities and be treated with equal respect regardless of race, colour, culture, creed or ethnic origin;

(2) reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, culture, creed or ethnic origin;

(3) reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians, and to closing the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity;

(4) reaffirms its commitment to multiculturalism and to maintaining Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an overriding loyalty to our nation, obedience to its laws, and commitment to its democratic beliefs and institutions; and

(5) denounces intolerance in any form on the grounds of race, colour, culture, creed or ethnic origin as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.

This motion is based on the racial tolerance motion of 1996, which was adopted in the fraught environment associated with the political surge of so-called Hansonism. In the face of Hanson’s calls to reintroduce racial discrimination in immigration policy, to abolish the policy of multiculturalism and to slash programs for Indigenous Australians, it was critical that our political leaders stood up for the principles of tolerance, fairness, equality and mutual respect. They did so in the racial tolerance motion.

This motion was proposed by the then Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley. Members of both sides of the House were
involved in its drafting. The then Prime Minister, John Howard, introduced it and the motion was supported unanimously by the parliament. The motion reaffirmed the parliament’s commitment to an immigration policy without discrimination on the grounds of race and creed, to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to maintaining Australia as a culturally diverse and tolerant society, united by an overriding commitment to the nation and its democratic institutions and values. It denounced racial intolerance in any form.

In my judgment, this motion contributed significantly to efforts to counter those who sought to incite fear and prejudice. Since the 1996 racial tolerance motion, however, events have generated new challenges to our values of tolerance and respect for diversity. The 2001 terrorist attacks on the US and the attacks on Bali, Madrid and London evoked calls for discrimination at our borders and in our domestic policies.

That no major political party contemplated a return to a discriminatory immigration policy speaks well of how far we have come. But, in other respects, in the domestic sphere, we have regressed. In an atmosphere of heightened security concerns, many Australians of Muslim and Arab descent have been targets of suspicion and discrimination. They have been made to feel isolated, mistrusted and fearful and as not being accepted as Australian. Government made the test for Australian citizenship much tougher, reflecting profound misconceptions that the previous arrangements were too weak to protect social cohesion and national identity. Multiculturalism—what is a truly unique Australian achievement—was eroded and ultimately the word was banished from the vocabulary of official discourse. The current economic hard times, far from diminishing the importance of action to promote equal opportunity and multiculturalism, require a reaffirmation and a strengthening of the commitments made by this parliament 13 years ago so that vulnerable members of our community are not scapegoated or abandoned. As prosperity ebbs, the necessity for vigilance actually increases.

The motion I move today shares core elements with the 1996 motion—a commitment to maintain Australia as a culturally diverse and tolerant society united by shared values; a non-discriminatory immigration policy; the advancing of reconciliation between Indigenous and other Australians; and the denunciation of intolerance—and it strengthens these elements. The motion adds culture and ethnicity to the original references to race, colour, creed or origin, which reflects contemporary language about diversity in Australia as well as that of international human rights treaties.

The motion recognises that, as we strive for a united and tolerant Australia, reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and others must always be at the forefront of our political, social and economic efforts. The motion reaffirms the commitment this parliament made last year when it adopted the apology to the stolen generation: the commitment to close the appalling gaps that existed between Indigenous and non- Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. Slow or no progress in ameliorating this state of affairs is simply not acceptable.

This motion explicitly and deliberately uses the word ‘multiculturalism’. The omission of the term from the 1996 motion reflected the then government’s ambivalence about this concept. It was an omission that was regretted by a number. As the negative sentiments grew in strength, the institutions of multiculturalism were eroded, the term was dropped from the lexicon and respect for
diversity was omitted from the list of core Australian values about which applicants were advised when they were applying for citizenship.

I ask the parliament to clearly declare that we are committed to a policy of multiculturalism, a policy that involves both rights and responsibilities, and a policy that respects cultural diversity within a framework of shared values, including a commitment to our democratic beliefs and institutions and to the rule of law. Some have asserted otherwise, but the fact is that this has always been intrinsic to Australian multiculturalism and it is important that we restate it, recognise it and affirm it.

Societies characterised by racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity have existed throughout history. With increasing population movements, they are very common today. But the instances where diversity has been experienced as positively as it has been in Australia over recent decades are far less common. A key factor in this has been the policy of multiculturalism. As Malcolm Fraser said in a seminal speech 30 years ago:

Multiculturalism is about diversity, not division. It is about interaction, not isolation. It is about cultural and ethnic differences set within a framework of shared, fundamental values ...

Our society is not perfect—the situation of Indigenous Australians demonstrates this—but I do believe that it is arguably the most successful, united and harmonious multicultural society in the world. I once thought that this was a particular perspective. But, having seen some of the countries that we are trying to emulate, I have realised that their commitment to multiculturalism was a very surface one, whereas we have been working at this for almost 40 years. I believe it is timely to reaffirm the values that have been crucial to the success of our society and I commend the motion to the House.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (9.20 pm)—Can I say at the outset that, when I was approached by the member for Kooyong to second this motion, I had no hesitation in doing so. I want to pay tribute to him, not only in his career in this place but in his former career and the advice he gave the Fraser government in relation to multiculturalism. He has made this country a better place. I think his defence of multiculturalism is something that is very hard to not agree with—what we suffer from is ignorance and prejudice. That is where people have their conservative views. I also want to acknowledge the members for Pearce and McMillan, who are in the chamber to listen to this discussion and acknowledge the part that they played, together with the member for Kooyong and the former member for Cook, who is here in spirit but not physically, and acknowledge the courage that they showed in arguing from the backbench with the former government in terms of the direction on migration and other matters. They are not easy things to do. Words are cheap; actions speak much louder than words. Each of those people took on their government and had some successes in some areas and not in others. Sometimes we take things for granted. What worries me is that we are losing a lot of corporate memory. We are losing a lot of people who understood how hard it was to get to a particular position, and people now take it for granted.

In times of economic uncertainty you can be led by pied pipers down the wrong road, and it is important to restate the values of this motion, which were debated in this chamber on Wednesday, 30 October 1996. There was bipartisan support. As the member for Kooyong said, it was a unanimous resolution. It was a resolution that was discussed some seven weeks after the first speech of the then member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson. She basically set bushfires burning, not just
in this country but in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world. Quite frankly, the initial response of the then government was inadequate. I do not think anyone understood how quickly it would take off, but it did take off and it damaged our reputation. We still have to repair that in a bipartisan way. We have to learn from those mistakes. We have to stand up.

This motion is part of that. As the member for Kooyong also said, the word ‘multiculturalism’ was missing from the former resolution that we debated. We have also included words in relation to closing the gap that lies between us and Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. It is a modernising of the resolution, but the values remain as true today as they were when we discussed it back then. They need to be taken up and they need to be argued, and we need to explain to people that the ignorant and prejudiced approach by some sections of our community is not going to benefit any of us. We need to lift our fellow human beings, not put them down because of race, because of colour or because of creed. Sometimes it is not easy to stand up for certain values, but these are everlasting values and that is why the member for Kooyong can be proud of his contribution to public life.

I also spoke on the previous resolution that was before the House in 1996, and one of the things I said then still rings true today:

Those who make political capital out of the fears and prejudices of certain people in our community must not be allowed to use the very real problems faced by many struggling Australians to further beat up the prejudices and the hatred.

In relation to the Racial Discrimination Act I had this to say:

The Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 is special to all of us.

This act is our bill of rights. This act makes us all equal. As parliamentarians, we should at all times strive to maintain the principles behind this motion and every subsequent piece of legislation in this parliament should respect the Racial Discrimination Act.

I think that is an important principle and I am pleased that the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is going to bring forward some legislation to reinstate the Racial Discrimination Act in the Northern Territory. My views on that issue are well known within my party. I do not support acts of racial discrimination, whenever they are perpetrated. They do not justify the means. We need to do things in a non-discriminatory way. I do not want to be saved by being discriminated against. Those concepts do not stand together and, indeed, they are a simple solution to a complex problem. It requires us to think outside the box and is something that I fought in this place going back to the original Native Title Act, where we successfully managed to convince the government to do things in accordance with a special measure, not in a discriminatory way, which was the then legal advice. That was upheld by the High Court and I think we are all proud of that.

These are not easy decisions, but they need to be made if we are going to stand up. I think the interesting thing with the debate—then, as well—is that equal rights do not mean equal treatment. There are many groups of people with many different needs and aspirations. Equal rights means a fair go for those different groups of people—and that means different treatment to ensure that all Australians live the kinds of lives that they want. In other words, true equality does require differential treatment. When we are all at the table together we have different strengths and weaknesses. If one of us is deficient in mathematics, it requires intense
help there to bring them up to the level of someone else. So when someone does get differential treatment—as Indigenous people deserve and need because of their special disadvantage—that is a positive discrimination which we should all embrace.

If you go to the Fred Hollows Foundation website, they have the statistics under the old method. It shows that 24 per cent of Aboriginal men live to the age of 65 and 35 per cent of Aboriginal women live to the age of 65. That statistic is a disgrace. It is an indictment on our society. It is not Aboriginal people who are responsible. It is not because they are living in a particular way. In other countries—in Third World countries—the statistics are far better. But today we have some news from the Bureau of Statistics showing that Indigenous life expectancy is longer than previously thought. Apparently they have rearranged the method to better account for Indigenous deaths, and Indigenous life expectancy has now improved by some 10 years. We should celebrate that, and this motion talks about closing the gap. Both sides of politics should keep working.

It is very easy and enticing to use race and prejudice to get votes. That is not a unique thing. It has happened around the world and can be done successfully, but what legacy do you leave your nation if you go down that path? It is well known that I had a reasonable relationship with the former Prime Minister, but on two areas we disagreed: his approach to Indigenous affairs and his denial of multiculturalism. I think he was wrong. He was sincere in his beliefs, but in my view he was wrong and his legacy would have been much better if he had stood up in this parliament and given a sincere apology to the stolen generations on behalf of the nation.

No compensation has rained on the nation as a result of the apology by Kevin Rudd last year. Indeed, on a number of occasions after he has been overseas he has come back to report that they know about the apology and were heartened by it. In Lima, of all places, when he was talking to indigenous people they knew about his apology. We are all enriched if we follow the values espoused in this motion that has been drafted by the member for Kooyong. We are not any worse off. The nation is enriched, the spirit is enriched and the parliament is enriched, and I think that is why it is worth supporting.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Hon. John Howard

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (9.30 pm)—I rise tonight to comment on a recently released book covering the final term of the Howard government, the rise to the leadership of the Labor Party of the current Prime Minister and the success of the Labor Party at the subsequent election. The book, To the Bitter End, written by Peter Hartcher from the Sydney Morning Herald, covers the last three years, and, in particular, the last year, of the Howard government.

Tonight I wish to place on the public record a correction that I believe needs to be made to a section of the book that discusses the behaviour of the former Prime Minister in the months leading up to the 2007 election. The book, To the Bitter End, written by Peter Hartcher from the Sydney Morning Herald, covers the last three years, and, in particular, the last year, of the Howard government.

Tonight I wish to place on the public record a correction that I believe needs to be made to a section of the book that discusses the behaviour of the former Prime Minister in the months leading up to the 2007 election. The book, To the Bitter End, written by Peter Hartcher from the Sydney Morning Herald, covers the last three years, and, in particular, the last year, of the Howard government.

Although he successfully concealed it from public view, Howard suffered intense moods swings. He frequently vented his frustration on senior staff, yelling and shouting. The greatest single cause of Howard's anger, according to several of those who worked intimately with him, was poor polling. The polls ruled Howard's emotions.
As a senior member of the former Prime Minister’s staff who, in the final term, handled one of the most contentious issues, I tell this House very genuinely and very publicly that this is simply not true. I do not intend to criticise the author. I am sure that he was given this information by a source he considered reliable. However, I say very directly that this claim is not true.

John Howard is one of the most polite and measured people I have ever met. His character speaks for itself. Even under the most trying circumstances during the last 12 months he maintained integrity far beyond what most people would have managed. That is not to say that at times events did not frustrate him and, for that matter, the rest of us. Indeed they did. However, the suggestion that each time there was a bad poll he lost his cool and ranted and raved at staff is simply not true. In fact, what always amazed my colleagues and me was that his reaction to bad polls was to dedicate himself to working even harder for the cause he believed in. He very rarely used colourful language. As many of us in this place know, politics is full of legends about abusive ministers and MPs on both sides of this House. John Howard was not one of them. As Prime Minister, John Howard was as he is today, a gracious, polite and dedicated man who did great things for our country.

I rise on this issue not to attack the author, who I commend for adding to our historical record, but because the Australian people deserve to know that John Howard as Prime Minister was as he appeared. He was not a fake. He did not pretend to be something he was not. This is not just me saying this. I note that in an article written by Tom Switzer in Spectator magazine—a very fine magazine indeed—on 9 May 2009, several of my former colleagues also refuted any suggestion that the former Prime Minister behaved in this fashion. David Luff; Stephen Galilee, John Kunkel and Andrew Shearer all publicly deny this was the case, as has, I understand, Arthur Sinodinos.

I can also say to the House that I travelled on many occasions with John Howard on the VIP aircraft and he treated the staff of those aircraft with absolute respect, even if the food he wanted was not on the plane. While John Howard did not need the services of hair dryer, I am sure that, had he needed one, he would not have thrown a tizz if he could not get one while touring Afghanistan. Finally, in all of John Howard’s time as Prime Minister he had two personal assistants. The second was on staff at the end and today continues to serve the Liberal Party faithfully. And he would not go through as many as nine personal assistants, as I understand current events, in just 18 months.

John Howard was a great servant of our country—indeed, he is a giant of our history. He left this country stronger, prouder and more prosperous. It was and remains the single greatest honour of my life to have served this man, and I am sure he will in time be recognised as one of our greatest Prime Ministers. It is important therefore that those who seek to demonise his legacy—and I do not count the author of this book as being in that club—are corrected at every opportunity.

There is little doubt that since losing the last election John Howard has held himself as a true statesman, particularly in comparison to others who have left that high office. Others should do the same to him and to his legacy.

Queensland and New South Wales Floods

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (9.34 pm)—I would like to give the House an update on the major flooding that has had a devastating impact on the cities, towns and rural areas across my electorate of Page this week and, indeed, in the neighbouring electorates of Richmond,
Cowper and Lyne and in South-East Queensland. Our trade subcommittee, which I chair, was due to hold hearings in Melbourne last Thursday and Friday but I cancelled at the first hint of what was to come as I received briefings on and read the weather forecasts for the Northern Rivers and South-East Queensland, which showed a deterioration in the weather.

Even though we did not go on to a big flood alert I knew from experience, having lived in a flood-prone area for a long time, what was about to come. I wanted to do what I could to help the New South Wales State Emergency Services, all the local volunteers, the police, the local councils, the Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter service, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service and the fire brigades in what has been a magnificent flood coordination effort on the ground, in the air and on the water.

Tragically, the floods were fatal, claiming two lives: a 70-year-old man died in his submerged car in floodwaters south of Coffs Harbour last Friday night and another man died earlier in Queensland. I know that everyone in this House sends their deep condolences to their families.

Today’s Northern Star newspaper carries a story of how four Bexhill residents, Allen Petty, Glenn and Kerri Nelson and Ben Saunders, used a canoe to save a backpacker, Jodie, from a near drowning just north of Lismore. While the foursome underplayed their heroic actions, they deserve the highest praise.

I really want to pay tribute to another small army of heroes: the 400-odd State Emergency Services volunteers in the Northern Rivers and the mid-North Coast who worked long shifts around the clock to prepare local communities for nature’s onslaught and to execute evacuation plans. In the Clarence Valley around Grafton they door-knocked over 10,000 people, warning them and having them prepare. Everybody was brought into service to ensure that we were well and truly prepared.

We also had SES people there from all over the state, and I thank them. They have received an estimated 2,700 requests for assistance since last Tuesday and have performed more than 200 flood rescue operations, such as assisted evacuations, resupplying food and medical supplies to isolated properties and helping with stock as well. Regional SES controllers Richmond-Tweed’s Scott Hanckel in the north and Dave Mackey in the south have kept me briefed on the flood situations, as have local mayors and senior police. I also had firsthand experience.

I would also like to personally thank my colleague the Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, for flying to Lismore on Saturday to announce that the Commonwealth government would be providing financial assistance to communities affected by heavy rainfall and flooding. I also thank the Prime Minister for his announcement in this place today of additional assistance, because that will really help those people who have been devastated by floods, both the individuals and particularly our producers: our rural sector and small businesses. Those cash grants of up to $15,000 for where they have to expend money getting themselves back in order through the floods will be very welcome indeed. In fact, I have had thank you calls from farmers tonight for that.

The New South Wales Premier, Nathan Rees, and the state Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, also came to the region and to Lismore to declare a natural disaster zone, pledge assistance and start working closely with the Commonwealth on a recovery plan for the region. The emergency services minister was originally there to open
a fire station. The weather changed and he stayed and was there for most of the flood.

The New South Wales government have appointed former New South Wales police commissioner Ken Moroney as recovery coordinator for the North Coast floods, a welcome appointment. Mr Moroney, who was stationed as a police commander in Lismore from the early seventies until the early eighties and experienced the major flood of 1974, this morning held meetings with key personnel in Lismore and this afternoon flew to Grafton to make assessments.

I would also like to thank the ABC, who did a magnificent job yet again in a time of disaster. They stayed on air 24/7 and made sure that the whole community had reports that were up to date, timely and accurate. We gave the message over and over to everybody to have their ears tuned to the ABC. (Time expired)

Kokoda Mateship Trek

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (9.39 pm)—‘Australians all let us rejoice, for we are young and free.’ Those words have never meant more to me than when I walked the Kokoda Trail with my good mate the member for Blaxland and an extraordinary group of Australians who took part in the 2009 Kokoda Mateship Trek and who join us in the gallery this evening. The trek brought together young leaders from our electorates from very different backgrounds and with very different experiences of Australian life.

From the shire, our four Bate Bay surf clubs were represented by Kimberley Short, Kane Hughes, Ben Thompson and Matt Read. They joined their contemporaries from the Lakemba sports club, who were under the guidance of Dr Jamal Rifi—a great Australian—and Mr Jihad Dib, the inspirational principal of Punchbowl Boys High School. From the shire, the trek received strong support from Qantas, Servcorp, the NRL, our local Bate Bay surf clubs and the Miranda RSL. I would also like to thank John and Patrizia Azarias for their generous support and to especially thank Jason and our staff for making the trek possible.

Our purpose was to build further bridges between our communities following the shameful events that took place in southern Sydney in December 2005. In contrast to these events, the Kokoda Mateship Trek demonstrated the true spirit of our communities, as these fine young Australians walked their memorial to our diggers in the original footsteps of the 39th Battalion—the first time they had been so faithfully retraced in more than 60 years. Most importantly, they joined to honour the courage, endurance, mateship and sacrifice of those who fought and died along this bloody, muddy track and provided the foundation for our unity as a nation.

Our diggers died for the future of all Australians, regardless of our backgrounds. We share in their sacrifice because we live together in the future that they made possible. The heroes of the Kokoda campaign are legendary: William Owen, Bruce Kingsbury VC, Stan and ‘Butch’ Bissett, Charlie McCallum, Lindsay Bear, Breton, Langridge, Ralph Honnor, Dr Geoffrey Vernon and, of course, the fuzzy wuzzy angels. In their day, on that unforgiving ground, they found something special within themselves to rise to the challenge—ordinary men called on to do extraordinary things. Having stood upon and walked the ground of their sacrifice, a new generation of Australians will carry forward their names and their stories in our communities, and Anzac Day will never be the same again.

Having observed closely the spirit of the young Australians who walked the trail, as they worked together, assisted each other and showed a moving respect in their tributes
along the way, especially at Isurava, where we also honoured the memory of Sergeant Brett Till, I have no doubt that the spirit of Bruce Kingsbury and his comrades is alive and well in their generation. When we returned to the Bomana War Cemetery, the young trekkers stood and faced the graves of 3,000 fallen Australian soldiers and made a pledge to be the best they could be—to honour those who were denied their opportunity of life more than 60 years ago. In making this pledge they have decided to be the change we need for our future, and I have no doubt their pledges will be honoured, to the great benefit of our respective communities.

I hope that the Kokoda Trail will continue to grow as a pilgrimage for young Australians. We must not allow expressions of national pride to be reduced to a tattoo or a day of drunkenness wrapped in a flag. We must encourage real contact with the spirit of courage, mateship, endurance and sacrifice that defines our Australian character. For this to happen, many things have to change at Kokoda. First, we must protect the integrity of the trail. It is not an endurance sport or a wilderness adventure; it is a memorial pilgrimage. We must ensure that the stories of Kokoda and similar campaigns gain greater recognition in our national educational curriculum. A memorial master plan for the trail is needed to enable new generations to understand, appreciate and honour the sacrifices of our diggers as they walk the trail. Tougher mandatory regulation of trek operators must be introduced to keep the trail safe, or more Australians will die needlessly. This is a dangerous trek in a lethal environment. It should not be taken on lightly. We also need to make sure that our pilgrimage brings benefits to the local indigenous population. We must ensure that their communities and their environment are not exploited, remembering it was their grandfathers who came to our aid, to carry our grandfathers to safety, so many years ago.

These issues and many others have been the subject of an almost 20-year campaign by our trek leader, the Hon. Charlie Lynn, who completed his 55th crossing of the trail on our mateship trek. I pay tribute to his tireless and passionate work in this area. He is also a great Australian whose voice must be heard on these issues.

Whether you walk the trail or not, my hope is that Kokoda will continue to serve as an inspiration to all of us, especially in these tough times, and remind us all of what we are truly capable of when we are true to the values that made our nation great. Lest we forget.

**Kokoda Mateship Trek**

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (9.44 pm)—There are turning points in life and turning points in war. One of those moments found Bruce Steel Kingsbury, a real estate agent from Melbourne. In 1942 in the jungle of Isurava he became a hero. The Australians were outnumbered five to one. Their headquarters was about to be overrun. At that moment, Kingsbury grabbed a Bren gun and charged into the enemy, mowing down 30 before he was struck and killed by a sniper’s bullet. His actions halted the Japanese offensive and earned him the first Victoria Cross on Australian territory. His commanding officer said it could be argued that his actions saved Australia—an ordinary man who did an extraordinary thing.

In the public gallery tonight is proof that there is a Bruce Kingsbury in every one of us: young Muslim Australians from Bankstown, young surf-lifesavers from Cronulla, young people whose communities have clashed in the past, young people who helped to heal those wounds in the place where Kingsbury fell. They are the young men and women who on Anzac Day followed me and
the member for Cook along the Kokoda Trail: Abdullah Albarq, Matt Read, Mariam Kourouche, Kane Hughes, Kim Short, Hiba Ayache, Ben Thompson and Mecca Laalaa.

Kokoda is a place that works on you. Over seven days we prayed together, we laughed together and we cried together. We cried tears of shame one day when we heard the heartache of an angel, a fuzzy haired angel whose efforts had never been deemed worthy of a medal. We cried tears of pride the next when we heard that this government would right this wrong. In the middle of the jungle we prayed for the soul of a young man who had died the day before, ripped from his village by a preventable disease. We cursed Charlie at night and his cooees at dawn. We found a panther in the mountains and we found something special in ourselves. It is inscribed in four words on four granite tablets at Isurava: courage, endurance, sacrifice, mateship—qualities that these young men and women displayed in bucketloads along the track. At Bomana they turned to face the graves of 3,348 Australians and promised to live a life worthy of their sacrifice. In truth, they already have. If those 3,348 are looking down tonight, I know they would be very proud. Looking up to the gallery, I could not be prouder. You have honoured their memory and left footprints for others to follow.

There are a lot of people who helped us make these footprints—people like Jamal Rifi and Jihad Dib; John Azarius and ‘Father’ Charlie Lynn; Chris Bowen and Tony Smith; Brett Mason, the first journalist to file a story via satellite from the jungle of Kokoda; companies like Qantas and Leightons; the surf clubs of Cronulla and the great community clubs of Bankstown; Malek Fahd Islamic School and the Australian Federal Police; and Tim Quadrio from my office—not just for helping us get there but for helping us along the track. Finally, I want to thank Scott. I guess we have proved that politicians really can be mates, and I think we really are mates now—a mateship forged in a place a lot hotter and uglier than this.

What began as a mission to bring two communities together became a pilgrimage to a lost part of Australia’s history, lost in the minds of too many Australians. Too few Australians know the story of Isurava or of men like Bruce Kingsbury. They should be as well known as Gallipoli or Simpson and his donkey. We have to fix this. As Paul Keating said 50 years after the guns fell silent on the Owen Stanley Range:

The Australians who served here in Papua New Guinea fought and died not in defence of the old world but the new world. Their world. They died in defence of Australia … That is why it might be said that, for Australians, the battles in Papua New Guinea were the most important ever fought.

It is our collective responsibility not just to live a life worthy of their sacrifice but to ensure their sacrifice is not forgotten. This is our solemn duty, lest we diminish as a nation. Lest we forget.

The SPEAKER—On behalf of all members, can I join with the member for Cook and the member for Blaxland in warmly welcoming the mateship trekkers who are in the gallery tonight. I congratulate them for their efforts, for their fine example of the future of Australia in the 21st century based on the deeds of fine Australians in the 20th century.

Petition: Murray-Darling River System

Dr STONE (Murray) (9.49 pm)—I present a petition that has been found to be in order by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions. Fifty families live on the east side of the eastern main channel in Cosgrove in northern Victoria. They rely on the Shepparton Stock and Domestic Community Water Supply Scheme. For the first time in 112 years they have no water for critical human needs or for their livestock. For generations, these 90 farms
with 50 families have drawn their water from the weir pool of the Gowangardie Weir on the Broken River at Cosgrove South. The water moves by gravity to supply some 300 dams in an area of approximately 10,000 hectares.

The water supply is used to maintain the homes and the households of families, obviously, but also to water the livestock of these food- and fodder-producing properties—and they are magnificent properties which, when it rains, are superb producers. The extreme drought of the last seven years has severely limited the available water supply, and finally this year that supply has totally failed. The community is now forced to cart in, in portable tanks, water from outside the district, water that they have been allowed to access from a major channel nearby. The situation will only deteriorate in the future with the decommissioning of Lake Mokoan. Releases from Mokoan have historically supplemented their open channel system.

A study by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries in 2004 into the piping of this system found that this scheme could save some 630 megalitres, but at $5 million it was deemed uneconomical. These 630 megalitres could have been returned to the Broken River, a very stressed environmental habitat. The failure of the water supply has driven the landholders to approach the Victorian government to fund the piping of the water from the nearby eastern main channel in return for the saving of 630 megalitres. Just 200 megalitres would be sufficient if piped to serve their needs. To date they have had no luck in gaining funding from the state government. They are now turning to the federal government’s Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin program, hoping to have more success there. This petition describes their need for that funding for essential critical human need and livestock water.

The irony of this crisis is that, if the community had been on the west side of the eastern main channel, it would have had its infrastructure upgraded as part of the food bowl modernisation project. It literally looks across a channel bank to see the alternative scheme. This is not a water buyback scheme. This community wants to continue to be productive agriculturalists, to produce food and fibre for the rest of the country. If Australia were a Third World country, no-one would be surprised about 50 families going without drinking water and water for their livestock in this the 21st century. But we are not talking about Pakistan or the Sudan. This is Australia and this is 2009, and this community, Cosgrove South, is only 2½ hours from Melbourne. It would cost only $5 million to drought-proof this area with a pipeline to supply water to 10,000 hectares of excellent farmland and thousands of head of sheep and cattle.

This petition was signed by virtually all of the farm families. They have combined in a cooperative effort to build for themselves the standpipe that has allowed them to access some portable water from a Goulburn-Murray water channel. That is a rather unique and outstanding achievement. They were quoted some $50,000 to put in the standpipe, but they were able to achieve this with expenditure of just $500 through the cooperative work of the community in borrowing, begging, lending and volunteering. This is a superb community that is doing it extraordinarily tough. They are carrying water daily to meet their human needs. They must have this funding. This petition needs and demands proper attention from this government. I commend it to the House.

The petition read as follows—

To The Honourable The Speaker and Members of The House of Representatives
We the undersigned land holders and members of the Shepparton Stock and Domestic Community Water Supply Scheme, wish to draw to the attention of the Speaker and Members of The House of Representatives the fact that our open stock and domestic water channels are urgently in need of replacement for critical community, environmental and commercial reasons. The petitioners therefore request funding for a piped Stock and Domestic scheme for Cosgrove/Cosgrove South and Pine Lodge districts.

From 105 citizens
Petition received.

International Students

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.54 pm)—I wish to draw attention to the importance and worth of international students studying in Australia and to raise some concerns about their experiences while they are here. I think we in this House understand that international students play an important part in our economy and in our multicultural society. In 2007, 455,000 students from more than 190 countries were enrolled across the nation, including 5,000 studying under Australian government scholarships. More than 75 per cent were from Asia, and enrolments from Africa, the Middle East and South America were growing strongly. They represent Australia’s largest services export, contributing almost $12 billion to the national economy in 2006-07.

When MPs travel around the world, particularly in our own region, we find it a source of great pride when members of parliament and important people from other countries tell us how wonderful their experience of studying in Australia was. They speak very highly of their own studies, or the studies of their children, in Australia. And, Mr Speaker, I know that you have had that experience many times. This is important because it is the experience of current students that dictates the views about studying in Australia in many countries. It certainly influences enrolment levels and, in particular, tourism. Generally, regional cities like Newcastle, which I represent, are seen very favourably because they have a distinct safety and security advantage over the capital cities. While our academic and research standards are highly respected, it is also important that we are seen as a welcoming and tolerant country. Unfortunately, that is something we constantly have to work on.

There are currently 6,000 international students enrolled at the University of Newcastle. They represent more than 22 per cent of the student population and they contribute about $46.5 million to the University of Newcastle. For every four international students, one job is created. That means about 24,000 jobs in my region. So you can see why it is a terribly important sector.

Unfortunately, international students have recently been the target of violent attacks and thefts in Newcastle. Just this month, four international students were robbed at knife-point by a gang of thugs that had members as young as 12. We have certainly been reporting those incidents in the media. It is always regrettable to see them on national television but, at this stage, pleasingly, five young people have been arrested. As I said, one of them was a 12-year-old boy, and the others were aged 13, 14 and 16. The police suspect that this is a gang that live close to the university campus and are targeting international students, who they see as soft targets. It is regrettable that international students are seen as soft targets, but I congratulate the local media on dealing with this issue very responsibly.

The National Liaison Committee have been in contact with me about their international student campaign. The NLC is advocate body for an international students in Australia, and they have taken up a multicultural issues approach. On 1 May last year
they launched their cross-campus safety campaign. Following the attacks in Newcastle and other incidents around the country, they tell me they have stepped up their campaign. I give my support to the campaign and expect to see progress—and deliverying—from the initiative.

The Newcastle University Students’ Association, or NUSA, take an active interest in the welfare and safety of international students and have certainly been part of this support campaign. They are having a meeting on 29 May to discuss these issues and I look forward to hearing their suggestions.

International students often live in low-cost areas around the campus and travel on foot. They are generally less confident in confrontations and less capable of communicating any problems to the police and I am pleased to see that the university has reinstated a ‘safety shuttle’ and essential services and that some members of the New South Wales parliament are taking up the cause of giving international students access to travel concession cards so that they are not walking around the suburbs late at night.

I want to give particular praise to Terry Lovett for his work with Muslim students at the university and, in particular, to Chaplain Tom Jones, champion of tolerance and compassion, who I know has been ill. They have done some wonderful work together specifically in assisting Muslim students and overcoming racism. But I think it is time that all leaders in my community supported our international students. *(Time expired)*

Question agreed to.

**House adjourned at 9.59 pm**
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 4.03 pm.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr BYRNE (Holt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (4.03 pm)—I move:

That orders of the day Nos. 1, 2 and 3, government business, be postponed until the next sitting.

Question agreed to.

LAW AND JUSTICE (CROSS BORDER AND OTHER AMENDMENTS) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 19 March, on motion by Mr McClelland:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (4.04 pm)—The purpose of the Law and Justice (Cross Border and Other Amendments) Bill 2009 is to amend existing legislation that facilitates law enforcement, judicial procedures and dispute resolution across more than one jurisdiction. Schedule 1 of the bill intends to facilitate the operations of the Cross Border Justice Scheme to the NPY Aboriginal lands of the central desert region of Australia to enable judicial officers, police and other officials to deal with offenders from any of the participating jurisdictions, which are Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

This bill contains a range of measures relating to legal proceedings with a cross-border element, and it includes New Zealand. Disputes having connection with different states are governed by the Service and Execution of Process Act 1992. Australia also has a cooperative scheme with New Zealand for the service of subpoenas under the Evidence and Procedure (New Zealand) Act 1994, the EPNZ Act. The amendments proposed by this bill are intended to provide some additional flexibility and to broaden the coverage of the existing regime.

The proposals are to, firstly, amend the SEPA to support the Cross Border Justice Scheme. This is a joint initiative of the Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory governments to apply initially to the border region NPY lands in the central desert. This will allow criminal justice officials to deal with offenders from any of the participating jurisdictions provided the offender has some connection with the region. The scheme operates under state and territory law but amendments to the SEPA are necessary to ensure that the SEPA does not override those arrangements. Secondly, this will amend the SEPA to clarify that prisoners subpoenaed to give evidence in interstate proceedings may give evidence by audio or audiovisual link with the approval of the court. Thirdly, this will amend the EPNZ Act to include family law proceedings in the scheme relating to the service of subpoenas between Australia and New Zealand. Family law proceedings were previously excluded at New Zealand’s request but the New Zealand government has now passed amendments for their inclusion. The coalition supports the bill.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (4.06 pm)—I rise today to indicate my support for the Law and Justice (Cross Border and Other Amendments) Bill 2009. It does contain a range of measures relating to the Commonwealth’s legal framework for resolving disputes as they occur across
more than one jurisdiction. I will come to a few of those measures in a minute. Essentially the bill amends the Service and Execution of Process Act 1992, the SEP A, to support the Cross Border Justice Scheme and to ensure that it can operate as intended. I will go into a bit more detail about that in due course. It also makes a number of amendments that are intended to deliver better justice services and improve the safety of communities and regions where they involve more than one jurisdiction.

The bill contains amendments to the existing legislation to confirm the capacity of prisoners to give evidence by audiovisual link before an interstate court, authority, tribunal or person. The bill also amends the Evidence and Procedures (New Zealand) Act 1994 to expand on the range of proceedings covered by the cooperative scheme established between Australia and New Zealand for the service of subpoenas across the Tasman. Furthermore, the measures contained in the bill are consistent with the government’s continuing commitment to make justice more flexible, affordable and less complicated.

I will deal briefly with schedule 1. Notably this bill, as described in the minister’s second reading speech, will facilitate the operation of the cross-border jurisdiction of Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara. I have probably pronounced those names incorrectly but they are ordinarily known as the NPY lands—the Aboriginal lands of the central desert region of Australia. That area is a bit hard to describe without a map but it does cover 450,000 square kilometres and has somewhere in the vicinity of about 10,000 people. This is in an area that I had some significant association with back some time ago before I entered the parliament.

I was actually involved in the establishment of the original proposal between the Northern Territory and the Western Australia government, which established the first joint jurisdictional facility at Kintore. That was brought about because the last thing that we wanted with respect to our Indigenous population—where, like any other population, crimes are committed and violations of laws do occur—was for people to be able to avoid prosecution by simply walking across state boundaries. In respect of some crimes, that required police to go through extradition, a joint investigation or simply not proceed with the matter. By and large, a lot of matters were not proceeded with.

A lot of what occurred in setting up a jurisdiction with a degree of harmonisation between state and territory criminal justice was to bring about what was wanted by a lot of the residents of that area, particularly the women that I met there many years back. They wanted people to be brought to justice and held accountable for crimes they inflicted within their communities and to not be able to evade them by simply walking across a boundary, making it difficult for police to investigate and prosecute, as they had to go through extradition. It was important to bring that about.

Nothing in this bill specifically goes to the application of that scheme. The Western Australian parliament together with the parliament of the Northern Territory will prescribe the operations and laws as they will be applied in this process. At the moment, the state parliament of South Australia has legislation before it doing just that.

It is important to note that this scheme was developed in response to the concerns of many of the old women—I hate to use that term but that is the way that they tend to refer to themselves. They were, in the main, the grandmothers of the area, and they genuinely cared for their offspring and their grandchildren. They wanted to bring about a semblance of law and
order. I have to say they were very much the driving force. They certainly impressed me with what they wanted and the reasons they wanted it.

This scheme is about delivering to those remote areas a system of justice, something which is obviously hampered not only by state boundaries and the tyranny of distance but also by the limited number of police. Adding to that, the complication of extraditions and all the rest of it makes it very difficult not only for investigations but also for prosecutions and certainly for the tribunals or courts that hear and determine these matters.

It was the NPY Women’s Council that highlighted the significant safety issues and concerns of their region. They particularly wanted to stress family violence, sexual abuse, substance misuse and other related matters. They clearly wanted to be able to get on with their lives with a semblance of decency re-established. They did not want people to be able to buck-pass the judicial system by saying: ‘The person’s no longer here; they’ve moved across a state boundary’, ‘It’s difficult to now mount a prosecution’, or ‘It’s too expansive to investigate.’ This addresses the very issues that the women’s council have been raising for some time.

This legislation obviously had the support of all sides. Before coming down here today, I was talking to Mark Burgess, the CEO of the Police Federation of Australia, and the President of the Police Association of South Australia. They were talking to me not only about the significance of this legislation but also about the importance of this being used as a vehicle for demonstrating the value of harmonising our laws and their application when it comes to remote areas. We are obviously doing it there because of issues such as the tyranny of distance. But in their petition it should not stop there. They believe we should be looking at all possible opportunities to harmonise the application of our criminal justice system so that it does not protect the people that least need protecting: the criminals.

I certainly share the view of my colleagues, and I would hope that people do see the proper application of this law as being fine for what we are doing in remote areas of Australia. It also should be the forerunner to what we want to achieve in protecting our communities generally—that is, ensuring the criminal elements do not have the opportunity, through differences in the criminal justice system as it is applies throughout the country, to escape the consequences of the evil deeds that they seek to perpetrate on our communities.

As I said earlier, I am aware that the South Australian parliament has proceedings before it presently. I am also aware of a recent comment made by South Australian Premier Mike Rann. He said:

The anecdotal evidence from police suggests that investigation of minor offences is not pursued, owing to the expense and time in obtaining an extradition warrant to a court authorised to hear a charge.

If that is true then it is not in the interests of justice and it needs to be addressed. That is essentially what we have been saying about what this piece of legislation seeks to address. It is common sense that it should apply not only to remote areas but also to the wider community.

Schedule 2 of this bill deals with the issue of audiovisual links. The amendments to schedule 2 of the bill are designed to clarify and remove any confusion about the use of audio- and audiovisual-link technology for SEPA. The amendments will make it clear that prisoners may appear by audio or video link when subpoenaed to give evidence before an interstate court, authority, tribunal or person. The amendments are not directly related to cross-border justice.
systems and can apply to any jurisdiction when a prisoner is subpoenaed to give evidence in
interstate proceedings. Currently, SEPA only contemplates prisoners giving evidence in per-
son in interstate proceedings. There is no implicit provision in the SEPA for a prisoner to ap-
pear by audio or audiovisual link when being subpoenaed to give evidence in another legal
jurisdiction. Audio and audiovisual link is currently used for prisoners to give evidence in the
jurisdiction in which they are imprisoned. These amendments will make clear that they can be
called on to do so in proceedings in any other legal jurisdiction.

Schedule 3 of the bill will expand the range of proceedings that come within the scope of
the cooperative scheme existing between Australia and New Zealand for the service of sub-
poenas. It will allow for the service of subpoenas in Family Court proceedings. These were
excluded from the scheme of arrangements when this cooperative agreement was entered into
by Australia and New Zealand. This will now set that aside and will allow for the issuing of
subpoenas. That will harmonise the activity that it is envisaged will apply across that coopera-
tive agreement between Australia and New Zealand for all matters, including family matters.

In concluding, I would like to think that this piece of legislation will deliver on its intention
to enhance the level of cooperation and harmonisation of jurisdictions, particularly in relation
to remote Australia. The reason it was introduced there was to ensure that the judicial system
and the justice system are not only fair but also affordable, available and flexible and can be
administered across state boundaries to ensure that people are protected and that those who
are found to have breached the law are called to account. I think this is the forerunner to dem-
onstrating that this country, which has a population of 21 million people, cannot afford to
have jurisdictions that are so estranged from one another that it makes it difficult, expensive
and inflexible to bring people to justice.

I would like to think that this bill is the forerunner to encouraging people to look at what it
is that we must do within our criminal justice system to ensure that these flexibilities, this
level of harmonisation, are made more consistent so the police can get on with their jobs and
the courts can get on with theirs and people can live with the general view that they will be
protected throughout our court system generally.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (4.20 pm)—in reply—The Law and Jus-
tice (Cross Border and Other Amendments) Bill 2009 demonstrates the government’s com-
mitment to providing Australians with simple and efficient processes for resolving cross-
border disputes. The government recognises the difficulties that can arise when disputes spill
across borders—but this is the reality today, both within Australia and also internationally.
The intention of these amendments is to reduce the additional complexities associated with
cross-border litigation in Australia in the criminal and civil areas. I am also pleased that the
Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs is strongly of the view that
the bill should be supported. I commend that committee for the tremendous amount of very
solid work that it does.

The debate on this bill, and the Senate committee’s inquiry into its provisions, has focused
on the proposed amendments to the Service and Execution of Process Act 1992 to facilitate
the operation of the cross-border justice scheme. I want to emphasise that the amendments in
the bill do not establish the Cross Border Justice Scheme in themselves. The scheme will op-
erate under legislation passed by the parliaments of Western Australia, South Australia and the
Northern Territory. There appears to be some confusion about this, so I think it is important to clarify the point and correct the record.

The amendments in this bill provide that arrangements under the Cross Border Justice Scheme will have primacy over any inconsistent arrangements in the Commonwealth’s Service and Execution of Process Act—in other words, the Commonwealth’s act is being wound back, where there was any inconsistency discovered, to enable the cross-border justice scheme to have primacy and not be overruled by inconsistent federal legislation.

There has been some suggestion that, in passing the amendments we are dealing with today, the Commonwealth would be endorsing all aspects of the state and territory scheme. The scheme does not require these amendments to be passed to commence operation. The purpose of these amendments is to avoid a situation where there are two sets of laws potentially operating in the cross-border region. This would lead to more complex and confusing litigation. There would also be a risk that aspects of the scheme could be found constitutionally invalid to the extent that they may be inconsistent with Commonwealth law, as I indicated.

That said, the government certainly supports the fundamental objective of the scheme, which is to make the delivery of justice services in the NPY lands simpler and quicker. The scheme responds to community concerns, including from the NPY Women’s Council, that justice services are being hampered by state boundaries. In particular, there is concern that state boundaries are enabling perpetrators of violence against women and children to evade police and the justice system. The member for Werriwa, if I might say so, immediately before me made an excellent speech in that respect.

The flexible arrangements established under the scheme will assist police, magistrates and other officials to deal with the high levels of family violence, sexual abuse and substance misuse in the remote regions more effectively. Faster response times mean offenders can be more swiftly brought to justice. This helps protect the community, gives a better result for victims and decreases the time an alleged offender may spend in custody before appearing before a judge or magistrate. I am pleased to note that legislation has now been passed by all three jurisdictions, which makes it important that the amendments in this bill are passed as soon as possible, and I thank all opposition members for that support.

The second set of measures in this bill confirms the capacity of prisoners to give evidence by audio or audiovisual link when subpoenaed to do so for a proceeding in a different jurisdiction. Currently, the Service and Execution of Process Act only contemplates a prisoner giving evidence in person in such proceedings. These amendments will give greater flexibility for the use of audio or audiovisual link technology. This will reduce the need to physically transport prisoners to give evidence over what can often be vast differences and, at times, in less than desirable conditions. These amendments do not remove the capacity of a prisoner to be subpoenaed to give evidence in person if that is required in the interests of justice.

The third set of measures is proposed to amend the Evidence and Procedure (New Zealand) Act 1994. The amendments will extend the scheme for the service of subpoenas between Australia and New Zealand for family proceedings in general, with the exception of two particular types of family proceedings which should remain excluded. International child abduction proceedings should remain excluded because of the urgency of these proceedings and the special regime already in place to accommodate service in these cases. Proceedings about the status or property of a person unable to manage their own affairs should also remain excluded. In
Australia these proceedings are mostly dealt with by state and territory guardianship boards rather than by the courts. They are excluded from the scheme facilitating the service of subpoenas between the Australian states and territories contained in the Service and Execution of Process Act.

Removing the restriction on family proceedings more generally, however, other than in respect of those two exceptions, will allow the scheme to operate in relation to civil proceedings. Appropriate safeguards against misuse remain. These amendments will bring the Australian legislation in line with its equivalent in New Zealand. I thank the New Zealand Minister of Justice, the Hon. Simon Power, for the tremendous cooperation that the government of New Zealand and his office in particular have provided in respect of these matters.

As members would be aware, the government is also progressing broader reforms to make the resolution of trans-Tasman legal disputes cheaper, quicker and less complex, as I have indicated, with tremendous assistance from the New Zealand government. This government plans to introduce legislation into parliament later this year to simplify the process for conducting civil court proceedings across the Tasman.

In conclusion, the amendments in this bill will benefit many Australians and give them greater confidence in the justice system and how they are served by it. The measures are aimed at the effective resolution of cross-border disputes within Australia and across the Tasman. The amendments reduce confusion around the Commonwealth’s legal framework for resolving cross-border disputes. They reduce burdens in the provision of legal services and facilitate a streamlined process to ensure the framework operates efficiently and effectively for all Australians. I thank members for their contribution and I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DIGITAL TELEVISION SWITCH-OVER) BILL 2009

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 13 May, on motion by Mr Shorten:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr Oakeshott (Lyne) (4.29 pm)—I rise certainly not to oppose the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009, but I do raise several concerns from the perspective of the people of the mid-North Coast of New South Wales and from a public policy perspective. By way of background to the bill, the government has announced that all free-to-air television broadcasters in Australia will complete the switch from analog transmission to digital only transmission by the end of 2013. Switching to digital television, in the words of the government, will be ‘a straightforward and inexpensive task for the vast majority of Australians’. We certainly hope so.

However, the government says:

… some viewers may need practical, in-home assistance to make the switch to digital. To ensure these Australians are not disadvantaged by the switch-over, the Government will implement an assistance
program in regions switching from analog to digital transmission between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011.

Those areas are the Mildura-Sunraysia region, regional South Australia, regional Victoria and regional Queensland. The message from the government is:

Lessons learned from switching over these regions will inform the broader switch-over of the rest of Australia.

What is described as inexpensive, practical in-home assistance, when you look at the financial impact, equates to $70 million over three years. In 2009-10, $11.3 million is being provided. I would assume that is for the Mildura-Sunraysia changeover. Then there is the meatier $31 million for 2010-11 and $29.8 million for 2011-12, covering the regional South Australia, regional Victoria and regional Queensland changeovers.

The message that this is an inexpensive switch-over does raise some concerns for me on behalf of my region, the mid-North Coast of New South Wales, in that the financial impact, as of 2012-13, stops dead. As we all know, the fiscal message from government is: ‘Yes, we’re spending big at the moment. In about three years time it will be the responsibility and the obligation of all of us to limit spending as much as possible for the broader budgetary considerations.’ I therefore raise the concern that $70 million is going to be dropped into four regions of Australia to do what is considered an inexpensive switch-over and then there is nothing after that for the other regions of Australia. It is, I think, a large hope that ‘lessons learnt from switching over these regions will inform the broader switch-over of the rest of Australia’. There will be people in other regions of Australia in need of in-home assistance. I do not accept that it will be a revenue neutral exercise come 2012-13, which is, sadly, when regional New South Wales and areas such as the mid-North Coast get to make the switch-over.

The Australian government’s switch-over timetable sets out a region by region transition to digital television, giving Australians ample notice to become ready for analog switch-off. As has previously been said, switch-over will begin in Mildura-Sunraysia in the first half of 2010, with switch-over in all areas of Australia completed by 31 December 2013. The specific date for analog switch-off within this six-month period will take into account local market circumstances and community feedback. An area within my region where there have been continual dropouts in reception is Mount Seaview. It lies in the remote central and eastern Australia switch-over and licence area. The analog switch-off will occur there in the second half of 2013. Another area of concern with regard to television reception is the Long Flat area. The Long Flat self-help facility lies in the Northern Rivers switch-over area and is due to be converted in the second half of 2012.

The message from government—in a letter I received from Minister Conroy—is this continual line that the lessons learnt from the switch-over in Mildura will help to inform the approach to the broader digital switch-over program around the country. Great weight is being placed on this issue but no financial resourcing is being provided. I would certainly hope that there is consideration of that question for the final out year of this switch-over period—that 2012-13 window—because for only four regions of Australia to be able to receive assistance of $70 million and the rest of Australia to be, at no expense to government, relying on the lessons learnt from the experience is, I think, a rather large assumption on the part of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. Otherwise, I think this is a sensible and necessary change.
I never thought that teeth and television would be close together, but the change has to occur alongside some changes appearing in the Dental Benefits Act 2008 and in section 202 of the Social Security (Administration) Act. As someone relatively new to this place, I find those sorts of titbits about the way government works absolutely fascinating. I am sure that my broader community at home will not find those sorts of issues fascinating, but it goes to the length, breadth and reach that the Commonwealth has to go to in order to achieve what is, on the surface, a somewhat inconsequential practical change from analog to digital.

I would like to make two other quick points, now that there are other speakers here. The first one regards advertising. In our office we are starting to receive a lot of complaints about advertising of digital. It is rubbing our region’s nose in it. The changeover does not occur for three more years and yet the promotion of digital television is occurring. The letters about truth in advertising on local television are starting to appear. The government needs to keep an eye on raising the level of angst about this changeover.

The other point I would like to make regards support for local councils within my region, and I am sure it is a similar issue with other councils around Australia. It is seen to be somewhat of a council responsibility to assist in the problem of television coverage black spots, and there are various programs that councils in my region deliver on their own. Quite often, however, they apply for grants from government to try and achieve those outcomes. There are some questions about the size of the grants provided by government and the size of the task that is being left for councils to achieve. The two are somewhat disconnected, the size of the grant being a lot smaller than the cost of the exercise for councils to fill these black holes in the delivery of telecommunications—in this case, digital television or television generally. I would ask the minister to consider the complaints from local authorities as to the level of support from government in helping to fill black spot areas of television coverage generally, and assistance with regard to this switch-over to digital for the local administrations, particularly in black spots and drop-out areas.

The federal government and the department of communications can generally share the love with local authorities in trying to make this as smooth a transition as possible, and generally share the love with regard to the question of trying, regardless of where people live—it might be up the deepest, darkest alley—as much as possible to provide equity of service in the full suite of telecommunications that is every Australian’s right to access. It might be television, analog or digital, or mobile phones or landlines, or internet coverage—but there should be equity of service delivery. I hope the government does not drop the ball on that and does fulfil its commitment to make sure whatever resources are required are provided.

I do not oppose the legislation but I do question the financial impacts and the missing year in the out years, the final year. I hope that the government provides an answer on that and on the question of advertising for three years for a service that we cannot access. There is also the general question with regard to the equity of service delivery by the government in regional communities such as mine.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (4.40 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009. I see this legislation in the context of the Rudd government’s commitment to not only regional Australia but also our senior citizens and those doing it tough. One of the great myths of Australian society, and it is a myth perpetrated by those opposite, is that the Labor Party and Labor governments do not care for
regional areas and do not care for those who are senior citizens. It is a great myth that they try to perpetrate and perpetuate.

This legislation is yet another example of the Rudd Labor government caring for regional Australia. Having travelled through a lot of Queensland, I can say that Queenslanders are often different. They are often suffering from the challenges of the tyranny of distance; they are often in small rural communities or regional towns, where they have difficulty getting access to good postal services, to the broadband network and to radio and television and those kinds of services. They are absolutely crucial. We saw that last year with the floods in North Queensland and we saw it recently with the floods in South-East Queensland. Queensland, and regional Queensland in particular, needs this kind of assistance. It is assistance the Rudd Labor government is providing with respect to ports, railways and roads et cetera.

This legislation is providing financial assistance for those who are in receipt of the age pension, the disability support pension, the carer payment, the Department of Veterans’ Affairs service pension or the income support supplement. It is the kind of assistance that is typical of a Labor government that cares for those in need. Certainly the digital revolution will be enjoyed by this country, and digital television will be something that in years to come Australians will think is fantastic. The provision of set-top boxes, cables and antennas will be necessary, of course, for the switch-over. Providing household assistance in terms of a package from this government will enable those in regional Australia to make that transition across a number of years.

That assistance and the kind of payments I have mentioned will not go to people who are generally wealthy. These people will qualify by means of their military service or their age, or by their income or their assets. People who are senior citizens and who are more housebound than others enjoy the benefits of television as a means by which they can be in touch with the world. I am sure all of us in this House have friends and relatives living in regional areas of Australia for whom the television set provides access not just to entertainment but also to information. It enables them to keep in touch with what is happening in the broader world, and this is particularly the case for those who are shut in. I have friends and relatives who are bedridden or who cannot leave their nursing home and for them television is their main source of entertainment. Apart from the community activities provided by aged-care facilities, this is the only entertainment they have to enjoy. Providing help for these people in the transition to digital television is very important. We all know that digital television will provide benefits in terms of improved picture and sound quality, and greater program choice for all of us as consumers.

The Rudd Labor government is committing $11.3 million in 2009-10, $31.1 million in 2010-11 and $29.8 million in 2011-12 for a number of regions—Mildura, regional South Australia, regional Victoria and the regional area of my home state of Queensland, between 1 July 2011 and 31 December 2011. In my experience, regional Queensland is full of people who have decided to retire in particular areas. They have come from farming communities or are simply looking for a life in rural and regional areas, having come from cities on the coast, particularly Brisbane. The Rudd Labor government is strongly committed to regional Queensland, including my electorate. My electorate starts 50 kilometres from Brisbane and goes into the Fassifern Valley, down to the New South Wales border and to the foothills of the Toowoomba range, including all of the Lockyer Valley. The people in those rural communi-
ties, certainly the people in Ipswich, suffered under the previous government because telecommunications was not something that was considered by the Howard government a priority for my electorate.

When it came to national broadband, for example, that concept was alien to the Howard government. Their fixed wireless system did not take into consideration topography, so great areas of my electorate, particularly where there were hills, could not get access to the kind of internet services that they needed. They had to rely upon dial-up services or could not even get access at all. This was a constant source of frustration to many people, particularly those in rural communities, but also to those in Ipswich, where I live and which is full of hills. Many people in Ipswich could not get access to the kind of broadband and telecommunications contact that they needed in their circumstances. So I speak on this bill because I think it is important for my state. It is particularly important for those many people who live outside of Brisbane, those millions of Queenslanders. Brisbane does not dwarf our state. It is small in terms of population, compared to Sydney or Melbourne, vis-a-vis the rest of its state. A lot more people live outside Brisbane than live in Brisbane itself. So access to digital television will help many people in rural and regional Queensland.

What we are doing is providing practical in-home assistance. We are providing help to switch from analog to digital. That is good assistance from the point of view of my electorate as well. We are seeing help being given to regional Queensland. It is going to provide access to information: technological access to a national broadband network, access to digital television and access to the kinds of services which will enable people to compete in health, schooling and business. They will also get access to the kind of lifestyle that is enjoyed in capital cities.

The Rudd government is strongly committed to pensioners, and this bill provides assistance to pensioners, those on the disability support pension, those receiving carer payments and those on the Department of Veterans’ Affairs service pension income support supplement. Since I was elected in November 2007, I have seen stimulus packages which have helped my electorate. The kinds of people that will benefit in regional Queensland from this sort of funding will benefit from the Rudd Labor government’s commitment to people on those types of payments. For example, in terms of the stimulus package that was handed down last year, 43,701 people in my electorate have received funding under the Economic Security Strategy in the circumstances of $1,400 for single pensioners and $2,100 for couples. I have seen 12,553 families receive the kind of financial support available through back-to-school bonuses as well. There were too the 119 farmers who were recipients in the regional areas of my seat. Even now, with this budget funding, we are seeing the 23,505 people getting age pensions, disability support pensions, family tax benefit A or carer payments receiving additional funding from the Rudd Labor government. So I see this bill in the context of the assistance given to the kinds of people we are talking about here, such as the age pension payment recipients and the disability support pension recipients. In my electorate we have 7,783 people receiving disability support pensions. The kind of assistance that the Rudd Labor government is providing through the budget and through the first and second stimulus packages is very important for electors in my seat.

I do not share the concerns of the member for Lyne with respect to regional Australia. I think the Rudd government is caring for regional Australia in a way that the coalition failed to
We see that in the kind of response that we have made in terms of infrastructure payments and assistance to schools and in black spot funding for roads to councils in rural areas right across Queensland.

I am very happy to speak in support of a bill which will help my state and help the people in rural and regional Queensland, as well as in the Mildura area, regional South Australia and regional Victoria. They are people on the land, mainly, and in small communities that suffer from distance. They do not necessarily enjoy the access to recreation, sporting, schooling and business life that those who live in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane enjoy, so any assistance we can give them in terms of financial support—particularly for those senior citizens who have contributed so much to our economy and community life—is a very good, noble and correct thing to do.

The transition to digital television and the assistance we are providing viewers who are entitled to these sorts of payments is a great initiative of the Rudd Labor government. It shows the commitment we have to the kinds of areas that many people think Labor governments do not care for—that is an urban legend and a myth. I am pleased to support this bill and I commend it to the House.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (4.51 pm)—Let me say from the outset that the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009 is a good bill. I do not have any problems with the intentions of it. The need to switch over to digital television is a concept that started in Australia around 10 years ago, in 1998, and it is right that we should move on. None of those things do I doubt. What I am concerned about is the readiness of the government to deliver the technology to achieve this changeover date.

It is interesting to speak just after the member for Blair, who talked about the number of regional dwellers in Queensland. I can tell the member for Blair before he leaves this chamber that, when I switch on my television at home, I too enjoy regional television from Queensland, courtesy of earlier government decisions, from my side of politics, that implemented the footprints around Australia to protect commercial television operators. I have always seen it as an unfortunate thing that, when people from my electorate of Grey in South Australia—not all of us, but a significant portion—turn on the television at night, they receive regional news from Townsville and not from somewhere in South Australia.

That brings me back to readiness. The timetable for the switch-over, we are informed at the moment, is to begin in the Mildura region in early 2010 and then move into my electorate of Grey in the second half of 2010. One of the things that concern me is that much of the regional television is actually delivered by a black spot program. There is a lot of complexity, and it is sometimes difficult to get full understanding of the issues across to people. I have found, while dealing with those that are delivering the switch-over to this new television system, that I am often frustrated by their lack of knowledge about many of these localised systems and how they will be affected by the digital switch-over.

Where I live, for instance, which is in the Central Australian footprint, television is delivered by satellite, which gives us Imparja, 7 Central, ABC and SBS. In many of the small communities, that analog signal from the satellite is collected by black spot transmitters, which were funded by the previous government, and then retransmitted into the district as a UHF signal. That applies to part of the electorate. Other parts receive that analog signal from a normal analog transmitter, and it is rebooted in the district via the black spot transmitter.
The government has indicated that in this changeover it is not going to reinvest and rein-vigorate those black spot transmitters to a digital standard; so they will be switched off. The government’s solution to this problem is to offer everybody a subsidised satellite service, which will still entail a cost of around $600 to those not helped by the bill before the House. So it comes at quite a cost. But the downside for communities in my electorate such as Booleroo, Melrose and Orroroo, which are existing off an analog signal that is rebroadcast in the district in UHF, is that analog will no longer be available and the transmission tower, which is not capable of picking up digital, will be shut down, and those communities will pick up their feeds from satellite. That means that at this stage they will move off their local signal and start picking up the Central Australian footprint, which will once again bring Queensland regional news into the living rooms of people in my electorate. This is totally unsatisfactory—they want to stay connected to their community; it is also pretty undesirable for those who run those television stations.

I understand the government’s proposal is to commission extra satellite channels to feed regional station programs back into the communities. However, detail is scant, the decisions have not yet been made and the date of early 2010 is looming. So there is a fair bit of unrest and unease about what kind of television reception many of these communities will have after that switch-over date. As I said, I am in favour of the switch-over. Of course we are all in favour of the switch-over—we have been talking about it for 10 years and it must happen—but it is just this worry over the preparedness for the technological changes that have to happen.

If we fall back on that satellite signal across much of our community and have not installed anything to replace it, I fear not only for the local television station but also for local advertising, which will fall away quite quickly. It affects businesses across the region. Somewhere further down the track in this debate we must also revisit some of the anomalies in those broadcast footprints across Australia where we have people living 2,000 kilometres away from the transmission source—that is, their local regional news program. It is particularly galling to me as I wander around my electorate only to get home and not be able to see local on television in the evening. It is something I have learned to live with, but for many others it is a major inconvenience.

It means that in South Australia, particularly in the rural regions, including Roxby Downs and Ceduna, it is difficult to get Australian Rules football broadcast. The one channel broadcasting Australian Rules football has no focus on the South Australian teams, whereas if you took your feed locally you would see Port Power or the magnificent Crows. People want to see their local team. That is the problem we have with the current footprints. Unless the government is prepared and the technology is organised on those switch-over dates, we are going to see a lot of people lose that local feed and they are not going to be happy about it.

The issue is preparedness. Can we do it on time? I would like to hear some strong statements from the minister. I would like him to come out and say: ‘Yes, we can. We know exactly what technology we’re going to use to suit these people, to feed local content into their houses, to support those local television producers.’ That would alleviate the unease. It would also help local councils which are dealing with these black spot issues. We all know that digital signals are not as strong as analog. We remember well when we turned off analog phones and went to digital that people were deprived of telephones in a lot of places. We look to Mildura with anticipation to see how the government addresses these problems, but I also
look to the minister for some strong indications about how the government is going to deal with these changes technologically.

**Mr SYMON** (Deakin) (4.59 pm)—I rise today to support the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009. More Australians than ever before are enjoying the benefits of digital television, with better picture quality and sound, more channel options and new content. These are all key reasons why people are changing over to digital. But adjustment can be difficult. We know that not everyone adapts well when there is a need for change, and nor do they necessarily understand how to undertake the few steps necessary to make their television viewing that much better. An example that is a little before my time but still quite relevant is when we took on the metric system. When miles became kilometres and even our currency changed and pennies became one-cent pieces, it was recognised that some people needed a bit more help than others in adapting to the way things were going to be done. But, with a bit of patience and some understanding and support, those who could not cope with the new currency and new measurement system eventually adapted, and most quickly understood that the change was inevitable.

Back to the 21st century, we also recognise that, although there is a small expenditure associated with this change to digital television, for some in these difficult times even relatively low costs can seem insurmountable. Hence this bill is aimed at making the lives of many in the community easier as it seeks to support recipients of the age pension, disability support pensioners, carer payment recipients and those on Department of Veterans’ Affairs service pension to switch over from analog to digital television transmission. Not everyone is entirely clear on what digital television is and how it works. Although that is probably true of free-to-air analog TV and most of the other technologies we enjoy in our homes and workplaces already, it is a change. It can seem simple just to go to the shop and buy a new unit, but when you get it home it does not always work that way.

Television broadcasts currently come into our homes as both analog and digital signals in most areas, but digital is the modern form of communication and is the method through which the signals are sent and received. I am proud of the way the Australian government has been working to ensure our country is keeping pace with global technology, which is in stark contrast to what we have seen of previous governments. The announcement that all free-to-air TV broadcasters in Australia will complete the switch from analog transmission to digital-only transmission by the end of 2013 will be welcomed by everyone once they have the facility to receive the signal in their own homes. Digital television is being adopted all over the world for the reasons I mentioned earlier: better picture and sound quality, better reception and more channel viewing options. This system of having to operate side by side transmissions takes up a considerable amount of the available spectrum—space that could be used for other services and on which there is a very high premium. The change to digital will allow some of those spectrums to be freed up for use in other areas. Digital still takes up a slice of that spectrum, but by removing the analog signals we will gain some of that back.

Furthermore, it is expensive and inefficient to operate both systems simultaneously, especially when all new televisions on the market now are set up for digital compatibility. There are several options for households to make the change to digital television. Households can add a set-top box, connect a personal video recorder or buy an integrated digital television, a
step I took last year. I have a technical background, but I had to do an awful lot of reading of the manual. I am happy to say I did succeed with that and can now watch digital television.

We know that more people than ever before are enjoying the benefits of digital television. One of the ways we can be sure of the feasibility of this change is through the results of the digital tracker survey. This comprehensive investigation used random digit dialling to survey over 9,000 households over 33 switch-over areas. The study measured the national take-up of digital television whilst also monitoring the Australian public’s awareness and attitudes towards the digital switch-over. The information from this research will help make decisions about how to communicate the message most effectively and ensure that any areas particularly suffering from a lack of understanding can be targeted more accurately.

The findings of the first quarterly report indicated a very high awareness of the government’s plans for digital switch-over, with over 82 per cent of households conscious of the plan to switch Australia to digital TV—although this knowledge varied according to many factors, including where the respondent lived. Interestingly, 47 per cent of Australian households have already converted to digital television and, of those with a digital set-top box, 82 per cent found that it was an easy step. I would like to commend the minister, Senator Conroy, for the way in which it has been handled. For such a big change to the community, there is more acceptance of the switch than I had expected. I think part of that acceptance might be driven by the content that is available on the new channels.

The research in the digital tracker survey found that the proportion of households who had expressed negative views was relatively low across all areas, varying from 11 per cent for Perth to 18 per cent for Sydney and regional and remote Western Australia. However, there were some groups who had relatively low conversion rates and low levels of understanding of how to convert to digital TV. The factors that were identified as important in this result were the respondent’s geographic area and whether they were age pensioners or whether they had particularly low incomes. People in my electorate of Deakin, east of Melbourne, are not expected to switch over to digital until 2013. They have plenty of time to make the necessary changes so that they can enjoy the benefits of digital television. But there are people who are having trouble with this change and who are also worried about the cost.

This bill is designed to assist those in the community who are most in need of help with the switch-over. The bill will provide welcome relief to those who are worried about the cost. I am talking about those people who are in receipt of the maximum rate of the following payments: age pensions, disability support pensions, carer payments and Department of Veterans’ Affairs service pensions. This provision is in recognition that for some members of the community change can be difficult. Just like with the change from the imperial system to the metric system, some people will have more trouble in making the adjustment than others. Even plugging in a set-top box to an existing analog set can be awfully confusing when you look behind the TV and find that there are a dozen or more different sockets that you could plug various pieces of equipment into—and, of course, it does not always work first time.

I have a friend by the name of Dennis. Dennis is on a disability support pension and he does it tough. He lives pretty much from week to week. Dennis was particularly relieved to receive the stimulus payment. He spoke emotionally about how much it meant to him to have a bit of extra money to cover his healthcare costs, let alone buy something extra for himself. But Dennis particularly likes to watch TV; it is probably his only real outlet. His friends fall
into the same category and are also on the disability support pension. They talk quite regularly about their fear of maybe not being able to watch TV anymore—and I can understand why. For quite a long time, Dennis has been at me—and I am sure that many people like him have been at other MPs as well—about some allowance being provided to people like him. On a very low income and struggling to make ends meet, Dennis still wants to be able to watch TV once the digital switch-over comes along.

Dennis never has a spare dollar—that is true—but every time he comes to see me he has an issue, and this is one that has stuck with him for a long time. Although it might seem like a small expense to some, it is not a small expense to people like Dennis. A set-top box can be bought from a place like JB Hi Fi for $49 and from some supermarkets for even less; but, again, that is a step too far for some people. So I am quite proud to be part of a government that listens to people like Dennis—the battlers who enjoy watching TV but who cannot afford things that the rest of us might not think too long about purchasing. I am part of a government that is aware that for some people change is difficult and that there will be those who will need help with the installation. The research tells us that those who have made the changeover themselves did not find that process overly daunting. However, for some people the idea of changing over anything electrical creates anxiety, and I am happy to reassure them that we will provide the necessary assistance to help them make the change. People who are eligible for assistance under this bill will be provided with all the help that they need to watch digital TV. They will receive a high-definition set-top box, cables and antennae and all the technical assistance they require so that they will be able to watch TV—that is, someone will come to their home and install it for them. They will be able to enjoy a better picture, better sound quality and also improved reception. I hope that they also enjoy the extra channels. Of course, the best thing is that it is free transmission. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (5.09 pm)—I rise this evening to speak on the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009. I am sure the Deputy Speaker will appreciate the areas in my electorate that I will talk about in my remarks. As many on this side know, I am a big supporter of digital television. It has a lot of benefits for the Australian people. As we already see, it provides additional and higher quality content, particularly for those of us who love their sport. Anyone who gets the opportunity to see the AFL covered on Channel 7’s HD channel on Friday nights will acknowledge how the quality is so much better than watching normal analog or indeed digital TV—you can actually tell the difference. A couple of years ago, when I first had a high-definition television set at home, Channel 10 was covering the US Masters in high definition for the first time. I think it was the tournament where Tiger Woods’s ball sat on the edge of the hole and you could see the dimples. It was quite extraordinary for those of us who like that type of thing.

I am a big supporter of high-definition and digital TV. It has a lot of benefits, including freeing up the spectrum. One aspect of this debate that we should acknowledge, and which the previous government acknowledged too when it was looking at the digital switch-over, is that the government will benefit significantly from the sale of the spectrum that it will get out of the switch-over to digital TV. Digital uses a very small amount of the current spectrum used by analog TV. It will be quite a boon for the government when it is able to have its spectrum auction at some point in the future when it has switched all Australians over from analog TV or the joint service at the moment to purely digital.
It is right that the government does help Australians, particularly those at the lower end of the income scale, to switch over to digital TV. I think that in the future we will see more assistance given to this area. In my previous role I had a little bit to do with the government’s views on the digital switch-over. I was always of the view that the government would be required at some point to help those at the lower end to switch over to ensure that we had a safe and successful switch-over to digital TV without too many missing out on the television programs which they love and have grown accustomed to. Taking away coverage of the Crows in Adelaide, as the Deputy Speaker knows, would be quite a step for government to undertake.

But we should not just help people on the lower scale of income; we must look at the areas which have traditionally found getting TV reception difficult. My electorate of Mayo has two such areas. One in particular is the District Council of Yankalilla, which this morning Mark Day in the *Australian* wrote extensively about. Led by the mayor, Peter Whitford—a great fighter for the Yankalilla area—the council down there have been raising this issue about how they are treated in the switch-over for some time now. They currently only have analog towers, and traditionally they have had significant problems because of the topography of the area. The Fleurieu Peninsula, in my electorate, is one of the most beautiful parts of Australia. It is very hilly and it has significant issues; in fact, parts of the Fleurieu Peninsula are just impossible to get TV and mobile reception to, no matter how much the government has looked at it over the years. The drops are too significant to actually get the signals through, particularly down near Inman Valley, so satellite will always be an answer there. However, for a large part of this area, which is not well populated—it is a small district council and faces the financial constraints that small district councils face—it is a different story. The government should, and must, step in and help the District Council of Yankalilla in upgrading their towers to be digital-ready towers in preparation for 2013, when the Adelaide switch-over will occur.

What is happening at the moment is that, because of the attention rightfully given to the switch-over, significant numbers of people are purchasing digital set-top boxes or digital ready televisions and are getting home and expecting to see the benefits of digital TV but of course they cannot because there is no digital signal. It is very important that the government—and I urge Senator Conroy and those on the other side to consider this—provide an assistance package for these sorts of regional areas, largely, who are facing these challenges. I think it is important, for the integrity of the switch-over, that we help in areas in which people find difficulty in coming up with the financial resources needed for the digital switch-over. It might not just be those on lower incomes who require assistance, but many people might require assistance to upgrade.

The other area in my electorate that suffers similar problems is Gumeracha, which is in the northern part of my electorate. Recently quite a bit of attention has been raised about the problem, and I have written to the minister raising this issue with him. It is an area which has traditionally suffered poor analog reception and in the past the local council has had to assist. Again, the cost of upgrading to digital is significant. There are quite a few people in the township of Gumeracha affected by this and, again, what is happening is that they are buying the digital TV sets or the digital set-top boxes and then finding, when they get home, that they cannot use them. This is 36 kilometres from the city of Adelaide. It is not that far away.

For the integrity of the switch-over, to show people the benefits of digital, we should be ensuring that those in areas that have traditionally had problems with getting TV signals should
receive any assistance that is needed. That is an important aspect that the government should be considering right now. I would hate to see the government just suck it and see, and wait until the very last minute for these communities to raise issues. As they are lower income members in our community, the government should act early and offer assurances to the community of Gumeracha and the community of Yankallila that they will get some assistance in upgrading their towers to digital-ready TV status shortly. Television is now such an important part of all of our lives that to leave some Australians, particularly those in my electorate, without the benefit of digital TV, or indeed without the benefit of TV, would be a disaster. I urge the government to consider this in the next little while and not wait until they have seen the first results from Mildura and other parts of the country. They know there is a problem; they should act on the problem. In the scale of things, the cost is not significant, but for these local communities the cost is absolutely significant. The federal government can and should help out in these areas.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (5.18 pm)—I am pleased to give my support, as other members have done, to the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009. As we all know, all free-to-air broadcasters are preparing for the complete changeover from analog to digital broadcasting. We will see a complete switch-over by the end of 2013. I am sure everyone agrees that that will come very quickly when we are talking about a change of this magnitude. This legislation is about preparing regional communities, and in particular pensioners, carers and veterans, to ease them through the transition.

Two things are abundantly clear in the story of switching over to digital television. The first is that digital broadcasting is an important tool for driving Australia into the 21st century. The second is that there are costs involved in implementing the change—and they are unavoidable costs for members of the public. For individuals, this cost can be as low as $30 or $40 for a basic set-top box. These set-top boxes simply adapt current televisions to digital and open up the full suite of digital options. Nonetheless, this legislation is about making sure that pensioners, carers and veterans are able to make the change and receive the support they need to do so. This bill is about balancing the need to switch off the old analog system and replace it with digital against the need to make sure lower income households are neither burdened with a financial strain that they cannot carry nor left facing unnecessary confusion.

This bill will deliver an assistance program to households in regions that will make the switch from analog to digital television between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. A household will qualify for the program when one or more residents is in receipt of the maximum rate of the age pension, disability support pension, carer payment, Department of Veterans’ Affairs service pension or income support supplement. The program will provide and install a high-definition set-top box and also undertake any remedial upgrade to the household’s cabling or antenna, where it is required, at no cost to the recipient. That is very good news to lower income households on those pensions and support payments.

I have had a bit of a taste of just how much awareness, interest, confusion and concern there is out there in the community about the advent of digital television, particularly in our regional community. By publicising in our local media that I would make available an information kit in my office I have found out that there are definitely sectors of the community that are seeking more knowledge about the implications of the digital television switch-over. After all, for every person in our community with a plasma TV with a built-in digital receiver, there
are similar numbers of people with older televisions, who have not yet focused completely on the digital television changes.

Over the last few months my office in Rockhampton has been receiving ongoing calls from community members wanting to know more about digital television, which is coming very soon. With the changeover being in the media more this year and with the imminent trial in Mildura, Victoria, the number of calls increased. I have also been asked to speak at a meeting of the National Union of Retired Workers, led by Jim Lawler and Dale Langford, who are very active in my electorate. They have also been putting the case to me on behalf of the pensioners and retired people whom they represent. With this in mind, I put together a short booklet detailing the digital changeover, as per the time frame set down by the Australian Communications and Media Authority. I publicised this booklet in our local media, and the number of calls from people seeking this booklet and its information was quite incredible. We had dozens of people requesting this information. They all had questions. They all wanted to know what digital television would mean to them, how it would affect their viewing, what sort of equipment they would have to purchase and when they would have to purchase it by.

Without being too general, far and away the biggest demographic of callers was the elderly in our community. These people are in the demographic that this bill protects the most, and rightly so. The whole exercise with this digital television booklet was a perfect example of why legislation like this is so important. After all, we are talking about a bigger change to television than that which took place with the change from black and white television to colour television, which I am sad to say I remember very vividly as a young child. It is all feeling like a very long time ago, I am sad to say. This type of information, along with the current, successful ad campaign from the Australian Communications and Media Authority and the new labels on televisions in stores, is helping consumers as we move to the digital television changeover.

So whether someone is young or old or whether they are tech-savvy or not, the government is doing its best to make sure that it is providing current and clear information. There are already wide sectors of the community in my own electorate in central Queensland who have embraced digital TV. But this legislation is for those who are in receipt of pensions, carers payments and DVA payments, who are probably among those in the community who still have a lot of questions and a lot of confusion and who are thinking twice about what these changes mean and whether digital TV is something that they can afford to get involved in—and of course the answer is yes.

It is critical that this bill secures passage through parliament now. The deadlines set down for digital changeover are fast approaching, and the test case for the changeover in Mildura, Victoria, is due in just a few months, in August and September of this year. We need to make sure that this legislation kicks off in July this year so that the country and those communities at the sharp end of this change are prepared. After that, of course, the rollout will happen across the country in the next couple of years.

The progression will be gradual. That is obviously a sensible way to roll out the change when we are talking about something of this magnitude, as it will affect almost each and every Australian household. The rollout is starting in Mildura, and then it moves to regional South Australia and other parts of regional Victoria, followed by regional Queensland. This includes areas in my electorate, which will switch over between 1 July 2011 and 31 December
2011. As I said before, all up, the digital changeover will be complete by the end of 2013. But for people in my electorate 2011 will be upon us quicker than we realise.

As we heard in the second reading speech made by the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, the timing is so critical because Centrelink needs the legislative authority to be able to use protected information that it holds regarding recipients of the payments I have already mentioned. In addition, Centrelink needs to be able to provide information about qualified customers to the contractors engaged to supply the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program. This is an important part of the bill and the time frame that we are talking about, because these amendments will ensure that Centrelink and the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy do not breach the confidentiality provisions of the social security law. They will allow Centrelink to use information currently within their systems to advise customers of their qualification for, and to invite them to participate in, this program. Information supplied to contractors will be limited to that strictly necessary for the implementation of the program.

It is worth noting, so soon after the budget, that this legislation is just one demonstration of the many ways this government is committed to helping pensioners, carers and veterans. The government has just delivered a budget with the broadest reforms to the pension since it was introduced 100 years ago. The government has taken those steps in the budget in response to the Harmer report, which highlighted what many of us who work in the community have known for some time—that, for many pensioners, the rates of the pension have not been enough to meet the rising cost of living for some years. In response to that, the government, in the budget a couple of weeks ago, provided for an increase to singles on the full rate of the pension of $32.49 per week. An increase of $10.14 per week is also available to couples on the pension. This legislation is one more way that we can take some pressure off pensioners and recognise that they do need assistance with the cost of living.

Australia is one of many countries changing from analog to digital television. In Europe, Sweden and the Netherlands have already changed and countries such as the UK and Germany are embarking on the change. Digital television is about more than just sharper images and clearer sound, although these are of course two of the biggest and most obvious benefits. Digital television is about options. It will allow for an increased number of channels and different viewing sizes to cater for different sized televisions. It will allow greater flexibility for people to watch their favourite shows, as evidenced already by ABC2, where a large number of ABC shows are shown at different times of the day. There are plenty of people in Capricornia who work irregular hours and shifts, especially in the mining industry but also in the health and emergency services sector—and, of course, not forgetting our farmers. I am sure they will be pleased to have this increased flexibility when it comes to making sure they can watch their favourite shows.

While this legislation deals largely with more elderly sections of the community, it will also cover carer payment recipients, some of whom have children. This will be of benefit to those families. But, beyond that, digital television is set to be a big win for families in other ways. I was pleased to see just last month the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy announce our government’s commitment to a dedicated ABC children’s digital TV channel. It will offer high-quality, educational, commercial-free viewing options for families, broadcasting children’s content for 15 hours a day and offering interactive and
online content. As a parent of two young children, I can testify to the value of such a channel. It was an idea put forward in the 2020 Summit and backed up with funding in the budget earlier this month. As announced in the budget, the government will provide the ABC with $136.4 million in new funding over the next triennium to support the children’s channel and also to increase Australian drama content on the national broadcaster.

There is another way in which I hope digital television will benefit the communities in my electorate, and that is through the establishment of our own community television broadcaster. As I understand it, the switch to digital and the turning off of the analog signal will free up a significant amount of spectrum that will be able to be used for additional services. One possibility is the introduction of community television in areas where that has not previously been available. I am pleased to say that already there is a group in central Queensland led by Brad Keyworth and David Anderson that is putting together just such a proposal for our area. Brad and David have turned their considerable industry expertise toward the development of a channel devoted to telling our local stories. It has been a long journey for Brad and David and their committee and there is still a long way to go. But there is tremendous support for their initiative across the community as evidenced by the backing they have received from local councils and business sponsors. I will continue to work with Brad and David and the people associated with CQTV as they negotiate their way through the technical processes involved in spectrum allocation and, ultimately, in their application for a broadcasting licence. It is a very exciting initiative and one that I fully support.

In the meantime, the government has clearly signalled that it recognises the importance of locally based media production in regional areas. We need a way to communicate our own local stories to the people of our region and also to distribute them to a broader audience. So I was very pleased to see in the budget the additional money—$15.3 million over three years—under the Rural and Regional National Broadband Network Initiative which will deliver more than 50 enhanced ABC local broadband hubs in regional Australia. According to the minister in his announcement of this program, the ABC will:

… encourage and assist the development of user generated content and create online avenues for local communities to connect and collaborate. The ABC will establish community websites and portals, and create ‘virtual town squares’ for communities to share experiences.

That is something that I think will be very popular in my area. I can see that there will be quite a big take-up and participation in that kind of interactive media production. The teams at the ABC in Rockhampton and Mackay are very well connected in our local community and are the right people to encourage the kind of participation and collaboration that that funding will facilitate and promote. It will enable local people in central Queensland to generate stories and take part in being able to tell our own local stories for a local audience.

There is no doubt that this is a big change. It is one that will be welcomed by all in the community and it is very important. The government has recognised the importance of making sure that everyone in the community can participate in this change and can derive the benefits and not feel that they are being excluded in any way on the basis that they are on low or fixed incomes. This bill has my strong support and I encourage those people in my community who continue to have questions about digital television as we embark on this journey towards the changeover in central Queensland to keep in touch and make sure that they are availing themselves of all the assistance and all the information they need.
Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (5.35 pm)—I am very pleased to make my contribution to what is a really important piece of legislation that will affect many thousands of households throughout Australia. The Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009 is aimed at making that switch-over a little easier for people who are in need, and I know there are a lot of people in need who will benefit very much from the switch-over. As is the case in your electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker Secker, people in my electorate have TV reception problems. These problems are not just with digital—that is the future for a lot of people—but even with analog. I know that you and I have discussed this over many years in our friendship and in our relationship over the course of a number of committees. I remember it being an issue in our first committee following election to parliament in 1998. The whole area of being able to receive television reception in hard-to-receive areas was very much an issue then and it will still be an issue with the digital switch-over.

I hope that the template your government brought to bear in terms of black spots will be one that we will be able to adopt. Good policy, no matter who introduces it, should be followed. I congratulate the former government on that. My electorate, in particular, was a beneficiary of a number of black spot programs for isolated areas and for those areas with hard-to-get TV reception. So there is a good template, and I have spoken to the current Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, who is cognisant of these issues and wants to assist. I think good work has been done in the past but we need to continue that into the future.

This legislation is about amending the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999. It is designed to allow information to be passed on to relevant authorities so that they can go about assisting people in the switch-over arrangements. That is the nub of this. I understand that the act, as it currently exists, is applicable to certain areas of government assistance but is not at the moment relevant to social security in giving permission to the relevant communications authority. It is, I believe, relevant to date with regard to information that has been relevant to people affected by this information.

Who are we trying to help? We are trying to help people in need and, as many of my colleagues have pointed out, pensioners are in need. I was very pleased to note, along with my colleagues of course and no doubt those opposite, that pensioners, particularly single pensioners, were able to get a much-needed rise in the pension, as were pensioner couples. On top of that are the other allowances that are going to flow from it, so I was really pleased about those changes. This legislation is designed to help those on an age pension, those on disability support pensions, those on carer payments and those on the Department of Veterans’ Affairs service pension or the income support supplement. They are people who will benefit from assistance in the switch-over, and the switch-over is meant to be complete by the end of 2013.

I was very pleased to contribute to the debate on our earlier legislation, the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2008, amongst, I must say, a lot of late night mayhem particularly caused by some of those opposite. Their shadow spokesperson, Mr Billson, has been an advocate of good TV services in Australia—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Secker)—The member for Dunkley.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker; I thought I said that. People were raising some issues in relation to that legislation, particularly in respect of black spots. I was happy to talk about that as well. Anyway, it is now mandated that the digital rollout should
occur before the end of 2013. That will be particularly the case for Tasmania. I look forward to that because, the way things have been rolled out until now, quite frankly we could be waiting forever. I have people on the west side of Burnie who unfortunately have been waiting and waiting and waiting for digital signals. It is so slow that I assume we will end up with the next technology rather than wait for the old system. Of course, these people are eagerly awaiting digital television.

Digital television is quite a remarkable technology. We have a choice—we have standard definition or high definition, widescreen pictures, high-quality audio and surround sound, multichannel programming, electronic program guides and closed captioning of programs, which is of particular benefit for the hearing impaired. These are terrific options resulting from digital television. How do you get this digital television? For the uninitiated and for the record, you can add a standard definition set-top box, as many have done. Some are even adding a high-definition set-top box. Or you can connect a personal videorecorder, or PVR. Finally, purchasing an integrated digital TV seems to be the go at the moment.

My only experience with digital television, apart from in Parliament House, has been through pay TV. I must say the difference in quality between that and analog is remarkable. It really is a different viewing experience with both the audio and visual service. It is something that people believe is part and parcel of the 21st century and it should be available.

This government, in its wisdom, is now carrying out a trial of digital television and is doing a switch-over, if you like, from analog to digital between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011, in certain areas. In the first half of 2010, the switch-over will take place in the Mildura-Sunraysia TV licence area. From what I understand, the Mildura region itself already has 70 per cent digital TV take-up. That is fantastic. Out of interest, I believe 42 per cent of households in Australia already have at least one digital-ready TV, according to ACMA. So digital is on the move. In the second half of 2010, the regional South Australian TV licence areas will come online; in the first half of 2011, regional Victorian TV licence areas will come online; and, in the second half of 2011, it will be the turn of regional Queensland TV licence areas. I could have said I lobbied very hard for my region to be first, but we were receiving too many other things, so all these benefits are initially being distributed across other areas. The important thing here is that these are trial regions. One good thing about trialling this in Victoria is that we will benefit from the lessons learned in that digital switch-over. All this will help regions like mine when we finally switch over.

I mentioned before why we need to change the legislation. I have now found the reference. From what I understand, the current confidentiality provisions contained in section 202 of the Social Security (Administration) Act provide that protected information can only be obtained, recorded, used or disclosed for the purposes of social security law, the Farm Household Support Act 1992, the Dental Benefits Act 2008 or the Family Homelessness Prevention and Early Intervention Pilot. So, quite rightly, before information and records are used to provide information for people to benefit from what will be an entitlement, this change in legislation is necessary. Anyway, that is what this legislation is intended to do.

How will we help people that are eligible, those whom I mentioned before? It will all involve help through the provision and/or the installation of any or all of the following. For the record these are set-top box, cables and antennas, to name the three major areas. So I am very pleased to make my contribution to this switch-over legislation and I thank the government.
for assisting those who will need this help. I look forward to the trials being rolled out throughout the rest of Australia. I remind everyone that, according to ACMA, apparently there are 19 million television sets in Australia today—so what are we going to do with them when we are finished with them?

**Mr BIDGOOD** (Dawson) (5.46 pm)—I rise to speak on the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009. The government has announced that all free-to-air television broadcasters in Australia will complete the switch from analog transmission to digital-only transmission by the end of 2013. Television will change from analog to digital, and digital television will provide the benefits of improved picture and sound quality and greater program choice. Digital switch-over is important for all Australians as it will not only provide access to a better picture and sound quality and to additional channels but will also free up spectrum which can be used for the delivery of new and improved broadcast and communications services. It is our commitment through this bill and through its service and funding commitments that no-one be left behind in the changeover. It is the aim of this bill that the changeover will occur with as little disruption to free-to-air television services as possible and to those who are most vulnerable to the potential cost of change.

Television is a common part of most of our lives. It informs and entertains. We watch news and current affairs, sports programs, movies, children’s programming, game shows and sitcoms—a bit of everything really. Most channels go 24 hours a day. We have a range of channels to choose from on our commercial networks and the promise of more to come with digital technology is something that I believe many constituents await with anticipation. The technology in which television will be delivered is changing and digital broadcasting will be universal to all TVs by 2012, or in three years time.

The bill amends the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 to enable the implementation of the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program as part of the government’s commitment to deliver an assistance program to households in regions due to make the switch from analog to digital television between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. A household will qualify for the program where one or more residents are in receipt of the maximum rate of any of the following payments: age pension, disability support pension, carer payment, Department of Veterans’ Affairs service pension and the income support supplement.

The government understands that switching to digital television will be a straightforward and inexpensive task for the vast majority of Australians—however, not for all. Most new TVs are digital ready, and set-top boxes to decode the digital signals are often inexpensive and are getting cheaper as more come onto the market and competition kicks in. However, some viewers will need practical, in-home assistance to make the switch to digital, and the government wants to help.

We will aim to have no-one left behind by this technological scheme. The digital switch-over household assistance package will involve the provision and/or installation of any or all of the following: first, set-top boxes; second, cables; and, third, antennas. Legislative authority is required to enable Centrelink to use protected information to identify and contact people qualified for the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program. This is essential to ensure we give everyone the opportunity to switch over. In addition, Centrelink needs to be able to provide information about recipients of those payments, with their consent, to the contractors engaged to supply the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program. We are a gov-
ernment that understands the need for safeguarding personal, confidential information disclosed to contractors, and the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy will be limited to that strictly necessary for the implementation of the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program. Contractors will not receive specific information about the customer’s age, payment type, disability or marital status.

This program is funded appropriately, with $11.3 million in 2009-10, $31.1 million in 2010-11 and $29.8 million in 2011-12. With the Queensland switch-over rolling out between 1 July 2011 and 31 December 2011, that means over $30 million will be available to assist Queenslanders with the changeover. This is good news—good news for the communities in my seat of Dawson, from Mackay, Proserpine, the Whitsundays, Bowen, Ayr, and the Burdekin to Oonoonba and south Townsville. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (5.52 pm)—I would like to first of all thank all members for their contribution to the debate on the specifics of the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Digital Television Switch-over) Bill 2009 and also on the broader topic of the switch-over to digital TV. The specifics in this bill, insofar as they relate to information for pensioners to help them with the switch-over, are within my portfolio, but the broader policy responsibility for the switch-over resides with the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. I will certainly ask the minister to examine the issues raised by members during today’s debate and respond to each of you accordingly.

This bill will amend the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 to facilitate the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program. This results from the government announcing a timetable detailing the region-by-region switch from analog transmission to digital transmission for free-to-air television broadcasters in Australia. We do expect that the switch-over will be completed by the end of 2013.

Some households, of course, will need to obtain new equipment so that they can receive digital television broadcasts. It ought to be a straightforward and inexpensive task for the majority of Australians, but some viewers may require practical, in-home assistance with the installation of necessary equipment. As a result of that, the government have announced that we will commence an assistance program in regions switching from analog to digital transmission between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011, to make sure that Australians requiring in-home assistance are not disadvantaged. These regions are the television licence areas of Mildura-Sunraysia in regional Victoria, regional South Australia and regional Queensland. The switch-over in these initial regions will provide valuable information to improve the switch-over for the rest of Australia.

The amendments proposed in this bill will enable the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program to be provided to households in these regions. The legislation will allow Centrelink to use information it holds regarding recipients of age pension, disability support pension and carer payment to determine qualification for the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program. Additionally, Centrelink needs to be able to give the information about qualified Centrelink customers to the contractors selected to provide the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program. The amendments will allow Centrelink to use information currently within their systems to advise customers of their qualification for, and to invite them to participate in, the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program.
The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and their contractors will be provided only with the information that is strictly required for the carrying out of the Digital Switch-over Household Assistance Program, and strict procedures and appropriate precautions will be in place when handling a customer’s personal information. Specific information about the customer’s age, payment type, disability or marital status will not be provided. I commend the bill to all members and once again thank everybody for their contribution.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

COMMITTEES

Communications Committee

Report

Debate resumed from 19 March, on motion by Ms Neal:

That the House take note of the report.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (5.57 pm)—I rise today to speak about the inquiry that was undertaken by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications. The Phoning home report was a significant report that inquired into international mobile roaming and examined the reasons why Australians pay so much for international mobile roaming. During the inquiry we found that many Australians simply had no idea as to the major obligations and costs that would be attributed to them when they were phoning home, so to speak.

Those of us who have travelled overseas will have no doubt about the utility of international mobile roaming, a service that allows you to use your own phone and phone number wherever you are in the world. Many of us also have stories of the shock of the mobile phone bill after travelling overseas. It can be absolutely frightening when you face an enormous bill after travelling internationally and using global roaming functions. No matter how careful you are in the lead-up to your trip and how careful you are in going through the issues with your service provider, there are so many intricate issues to deal with when it comes to mobile roaming. During the inquiry the committee was confronted with evidence of bills into the tens of thousands of dollars when people returned from their overseas trips having used international mobile roaming. The committee recognised that this is a very serious concern but also realised that it is a concern that does not affect everybody. However, when travelling internationally, with young children having their own mobile phones and everybody seeming to have an abundance of mobile telephony, it is wise for all people to understand the serious issues that affect them when they are using a mobile phone overseas.

One of the things that kept coming through in the evidence to the inquiry was that for the major players, the telcos, it does not really represent a big share of their revenue and that ensuring that consumers are reliably informed is not at the top of their list of things to do. Although there was universal agreement that this is an ugly area of telecommunications and that it can be frightfully expensive, of which many people are not aware, we learnt that there are many influences on that final bill that cannot be directly regulated or affected by our institutions and framework within Australia. The report recognised that not all of the factors associ-
ated with global roaming charges are within the influence of the telecommunications companies.

The committee found that the enormous cost of mobile roaming can be attributed to the technical nature of roaming—whereby, for example, the customer pays to receive calls—and to Australian telcos’ inability to negotiate favourable deals for their Australian consumers. To give a brief description of how this works, roaming charges and standard local calling arrangements are very complex. The complexity of roaming has an influence on the cost of roaming services. Of particular note is the fact that a traveller using roaming pays for both made and received calls. So, if you are overseas and using roaming, you actually pay for both receiving and making those calls. A traveller who receives a call but allows that call to go to voicemail, retrieves that message from voicemail and then returns the call is effectively paying for four international calls. This pricing arrangement is almost certainly responsible for a number of unexpectedly high bills. It is quite a complex arrangement.

I know that I was unaware of exactly how this process works. Many years ago when my children were overseas I would call them so that they did not have to bear the cost of the call. I would call my children, or friends and relatives when they were overseas, from my home number not realising that they were incurring significant costs for those calls. I am sure that most parents are unaware of this. They might have children overseas during gap years, as is the norm these days.

To improve the bargaining positions of Australian telcos, the committee has recommended a policy of regulating the framework for the wholesale cost of roaming through bilateral and multilateral negotiations with other countries, making sure that countries with the greatest number of Australian visitors are given priority. The committee also believes that competition can be enhanced within Australia. To do this, the committee wants temporary mobile number portability for roaming services to be implemented. This will allow consumers to choose the best roaming deal for their needs. The provision of information on roaming to customers can also be improved enormously. One recommendation among many made by the committee was that the Australian Communications and Media Authority facilitate a meeting with the Communications Alliance to discuss the development of a minimum standard for consumer information and awareness on roaming and potential costs, and that the Australian government explore opportunities to collaborate with the Australian Telecommunication Users Group ‘Roam Fair’ campaign.

There is a role for government in trying to put in place a framework that makes sure that charges at a wholesale level, which are generated offshore, are within some realistic parameters. That should be part of our diplomacy and advocacy when it comes to bilateral and multilateral activity. The committee heard horror stories from many people about how they were treated in various countries and the negotiations they had to undertake to find their way through a myriad of very complex issues.

The committee also recommends that, to ensure that travellers are aware of the alternatives to mobile roaming, these be incorporated into information in roaming provided by the Australian government. I believe the committee’s recommendations for the general public are practical and realistic. They start with a very basic call to consumers to be very alert, to avoid being very alarmed when you come home and realise that you have got the most significant bill, which you thought you controlled but which you definitely do not control. That comes from
the fact that there are many charges that are paid to a visited network by the home network, irrespective of whether the home network recovers any fees from its customer. The home network operator therefore takes on many of those risks, but they are obviously passed on.

The committee heard evidence that the wholesale billing method can cause delays to the billing of international mobile roaming charges to the end user. Sometimes providers are unable to provide current balances of international roaming charges to their customers because of delays in receiving billing information from visited network providers. We heard that even people who rang up on a daily basis to check what their balance was and were given a balance could not be given a clear idea because those other costs had not been added to the equation. We heard many of those costs were delayed for maybe five to six months at a time. There was some discrepancy with that and some debate and argument about that between the companies. We certainly heard from users and their representatives that they did have major bills and they received those bills up to many months after they had returned home.

In its evidence, the ACCC determined that the mark-up component of roaming retail charges is not governed by any common set of principles, and that rather concerned me. They are saying that each home network operator is free to determine the size of the mark-up component of the retail price. I think it is relatively dangerous to not have a governing common set of principles in this. I think it was the ombudsman, who gave evidence in front our committee, who got caught out herself with additional charges when she was on a trip overseas and came back home. She is the woman of all knowledge, did everything right and ensured that she was well and truly covered, and on her return to Australia she found that she had a bill that she had not anticipated getting. Australians need to be very aware that this is a significant issue.

There can be no doubt that it will take time before Australians are offered really competitive roaming rates. But, hopefully, the committee’s recommendations will go a long way toward reducing the cost of phoning home in the future. Hopefully, the committee’s recommendations will be taken up and implemented. I think they are commonsense. They are certainly not recommendations that are way out or not achievable. It is most important that there be a regulatory framework that enables us to be sure that—as much as is possible—we can budget for and allow for the correct use of a mobile phone whilst we are travelling overseas.

I was very proud and pleased to be part of the communications committee report. I commend the chair for her dedication to the chosen task. I think all of the committee members worked well on a topic that is not an easy topic to get really involved in. It is quite complex. I commend every committee member who really put themselves in the position of questioning intently the people who appeared before our committee—the regulators, the providers and the telcos. I have already commended the chair, who has just walked into the room, for her great chairmanship of this committee. I was very pleased to be part of a very active and extremely well organised committee in producing this report, Phoning home.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (6.09 pm)—I too rise to commend to the House the recommendations of the report of the Standing Committee on Communications on its inquiry into the costs of international roaming, titled Phoning home. The inquiry was undertaken as a result of concerns associated with the cost of international roaming. The terms of reference for the inquiry were specifically aimed at finding out the basis for the costs associated with inter-
national roaming, the transparency of these costs to both regulators and consumers, and whether emerging technology could reduce the impact of such costs.

The use of international roaming on one’s mobile phone when travelling has become commonly accepted. This reflects the world we live in today—a world where people legitimately expect to be able to be contacted, even if they are overseas. Despite this, the costs of using international roaming are still high. It became evident during our inquiry that the cost of international roaming is much greater than normal mobile phone use. While we have seen mobile phone costs decrease here in Australia, we have not seen such a decrease in the cost of international roaming.

The committee heard evidence that many travellers were shocked at the cost of their phone bills upon returning to Australia. As the previous speaker indicated, sometimes these costs did not become evident for many months. This includes shock associated with voice calls but also, increasingly, shock associated with data downloads—now that the technology is getting quite sophisticated, data downloads were also billed at a very expensive rate and this was a matter of concern for many travellers.

The high cost of roaming is a result of both the complex technical treatment required to route roaming calls and the fact that the costs of roaming are determined by agreements between two network operators—the Australian network and the host network in the other country. So there are really two causes of the high cost of roaming. Firstly, there is the wholesale cost—that is, the amount charged by the foreign networks to the Australian providers. Secondly, there is the retail cost—the amount that Australian telco companies charge their customers. To address the first cost—the wholesale cost—the committee recommends that the government pursue bilateral and multilateral agreements with other countries to regulate the cost of roaming. The committee also suggests that the priority should be given to countries that large numbers of Australians visit.

An example of such a framework comes from the European Union, where the European Commission introduced roaming regulations in 2007. Its review in 2008 showed that the price of roaming has fallen significantly. I appreciate that the EU is a unique international institution and a very different community of interests than is present in our region. However, the European experience shows that international agreements could be possible and could be effective.

In the last century, the international community established the Universal Postal Union, which sets standards and duties for all international mail. It is surely not beyond us to conclude that a similar form of agreement for things such as roaming is possible in the 21st century. I accept that a global agreement on roaming charges and standards is an ambitious objective, so in the short term we can look at taking other action to reduce the costs of phoning home while overseas. One that comes to mind is a bilateral agreement with New Zealand, a destination to which 19 per cent of all Australians travelled in 2007.

A further problem for Australian consumers is that Australia’s market is not very large on an international scale. That means, as I just mentioned, that without internationally agreed rules Australian networks are generally price takers rather than price setters and they have limited alternatives to accepting existing pricing arrangements.
But addressing the wholesale cost of roaming is not the only story. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has determined that the mark-up component of roaming charges is not governed by any unifying set of principles. To address this, the committee has made recommendations that the ACCC introduce reporting requirements for Australian providers in relation to their international roaming services so that the public can know how the price of their roaming calls is being constructed.

This reporting ought to be complemented by the Australian Communications and Media Authority developing a minimum standard for consumer information on potential costs and could collaborate with the Australian Telecommunication Users Group’s Roam Fair campaign. I also believe that while it would not be fruitful to set price controls directly on roaming charges, it may be viable to introduce regulation to control, perhaps, the percentage mark-up that Australian firms are able to pass on to customers.

Finally, the committee spent considerable time and energy exploring other communication options for Australians overseas, including international calling cards, short message services, the use of local phone networks, voice over the internet protocol, email and hotel and public phones. All of these options should be promoted by the government when they provide information on roaming so that consumers realise that there are choices when they are phoning home. In this globalised world Australians travel for a whole range of reasons, but whatever the reason and wherever they go, they should be able to stay in touch. Phoning home should not be an ordeal and keeping in touch with the office or with friends or family should not be difficult. Global mobile roaming services have become a key way for Australians overseas to contact home but for too many the cost is neither productive nor expected. In our report there have been some simple recommendations and simple steps that we can take in the short term to make sure that roaming prices are fairer and that information is available. I look forward to working towards a long-term international agreement on roaming standards and prices.

I would like to conclude by taking this opportunity to thank the committee, particularly the chair, the member for Robertson, and also thank the secretariat for their work on the inquiry—they did a lot of work in putting together the report—and also thank the witnesses that appeared. They provided some invaluable information to the committee. It was a complex area and their information was vital in ensuring that we got our heads around the content. I commend the report to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Schultz) adjourned.

Treaties Committee
Report

Debate resumed from 19 March, on motion by Mr Kelvin Thomson:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (6.17 pm)—As a signatory to this committee’s dissenting report I want to take some time to explain my position and why I felt moved to sign a minority report. The first thing I want to establish absolutely clearly is that the member for Mallee is no climate change sceptic. In fact over the years it has been the member for Mallee who has raised the issue, particularly in respect to the changing pattern of precipitation across the southern half of the continent. There were private member motions one after another through a period of probably 10 years before anybody else in the parliament was talking about the impact of...
climate change on our continent. I can remember one private member’s motion when I was actually chastised by two opposition members—they are now government members and present in the parliament—with one actually alleging that precipitation in Australia was increasing and not, as I was arguing, decreasing.

It is interesting that in 2002 I tabled a very comprehensive report on the issue of weather modification, which included charts that Professor Garnaut has subsequently relied on in his discussion about the impacts of climate change in his recent comprehensive report. I will be very disappointed if government members haul out the old chestnut that because I have written a dissenting report on this particular report that I am a climate change sceptic. It is far from the truth.

I have never really seen the logic of signing the Kyoto protocol with the suggestion that this would be a panacea for the very serious issue of reducing carbon emissions into the atmosphere. I felt over the years that it was inappropriate to sign such a protocol when it put our economy at risk and it gave economies of other more prolific emitters in other countries the opportunity to do nothing. We all are concerned about the globe and I think it needs to be a global response, not what I saw in the initial Kyoto protocol that we were signing.

However, I was prepared to consider that, but the reality is that Kyoto is already a decade old. Time, science and engineering have moved on and there are many more published opportunities for a better outcome with respect to the commitments that countries make and achieving outcomes that the Kyoto agreement did not achieve, especially for Australia and other developed countries. We now await version 2 with great interest with regard to the outcomes from Copenhagen later this year. My reason for dissent is particular to the evidence that the committee received when it gathered information in preparation for this report. I feel that it does not give credence to all of the discussion that was put to us in evidence from people who hold a contrary point of view. I was just a bit disappointed that government members were so keen on honouring the election commitment they made that this contrary evidence was not given due regard.

The other thing that disappointed me is with regard to the lack of consideration of ramifications—not just of signing Kyoto but of participating in its outcomes—on our economy. That is a debate we will continue to have as a parliament from here on. I chose to support other coalition members and not sign the majority report to make sure that the points I am making here get proper airing. Some of the recommendations we support include recommendations 5 and 8. Those are about doing things and making things happen to address the issue of carbon abatement.

I am a great enthusiast for the opportunities that solar power presents us. There is a huge opportunity in my part of the world. One thing we have in the electorate of Mallee is plenty of sunshine. I made a commitment at the last federal election: I wanted to see Mallee become the solar power generation capital of the world. In fact, we now have, with a commitment of $75 million from the former government and $50 million from the state, a huge power station being established just south of Mildura that will power 43,000 homes. There is already another project stimulated with the announcement of a $100 million grant from the Victorian state government. Many municipalities are competing to take part in that opportunity.

My focus, probably as a result of my background in engineering, is: let us tackle this very serious issue of carbon abatement with real solutions. It is interesting to see how real solutions
are evolving. There is a proposal by a commercial company known as MBD Energy. Their proposal is absolutely innovative, with prototypes. They are currently negotiating for access to the stack exhaust from Loy Yang power station in Victoria in order to combine that with the huge amount of Melbourne and Latrobe Valley sewage. It is pumped past the power station. They would combine two elements together with sunshine. The outcome, through the process of growing algae in perspex pipes probably 350 millimetres in diameter, is being able to use what has been provided to us by nature positively and constructively. They will combine carbon dioxide with sewage and sunshine to create a commercial product, which is a nutrient for livestock and fuel in a reusable form. Admittedly, it may only stop the CO2 from getting into the atmosphere and recycling it through another cycle, but it certainly deters the final outcome of carbon getting into our atmosphere.

I put those comments on the record as to why I have signed a dissenting report. I want to see a much more productive outcome and actually reduce emissions, not rely so heavily on the poetic nature of signing an agreement which other countries have long since signed and where outcomes have not been produced. I thank the chamber for the opportunity. I would prefer to have seen more balance in the report. I think it has neglected to give proper weight to alternative actions that have the potential to make real progress in a low-carbon economy.

Ms NEAL (Robertson) (6.25 pm)—The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties conducted an inquiry following the government’s signing of the Kyoto protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This report is a result of that inquiry. The report, entitled Report 100: Treaties tabled on 25 June 2008 (2), examines issues arising out of Australia’s ratification of the Kyoto protocol in December 2007 and recommends an approach for Australia to adopt at the 15th conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Thirty-two submissions were received and 33 witnesses were examined at nine public hearings conducted by the committee in Canberra, Brisbane, Darwin and Perth from August to December 2008. Contrary to the views of the previous speaker, the member for Mallee, it was a very exhaustive inquiry and that a large range of views were taken into account and considered. I congratulate the chair, Kelvin Thomson, for making such huge efforts to ensure that anyone who had a view in relation to the protocol was allowed an opportunity to provide evidence to the committee.

It was not my intention to raise the issue of the dissenting report when I first thought about speaking on the report here today, but I cannot help but be reminded of an inquiry I was involved in in the early nineties where coalition members tried to put forward a minority report which argued that there was no scientific evidence linking the effects of smoking to people’s health. The acrobatics of the members and the views that they attempted to express on that occasion were extremely similar to the sorts of views that they are expressing today. I find it disappointing that members of the committee who heard evidence that I think is so overwhelming and so extensive have failed to admit in the light of that evidence that their previous position not to sign the Kyoto protocol was an incorrect decision and that they are not wise enough to admit their mistake and support the government in its signing of the protocol.

The committee was presented with evidence obtained from ice cores which demonstrated that over the last 400,000 years global temperatures have varied in alignment with glacial and interglacial periods. Carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere over this period have
ranged from 180 parts per million to 280 parts per million, cycling in parallel with temperature changes, but they have remained below 300 parts per million for at least 420,000 years. However, in the last 150 years, the long-term trend has been an increase in global temperatures, both on the surface of the planet and in the oceans. There has also been an increase in carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere, which are currently around 380 parts per million.

With the industrial revolution, humans began transferring the carbon that was effectively locked away in the earth’s crust to the atmosphere—and 60 per cent remains in the atmosphere. As a result, atmospheric CO2 concentrations have increased from 280 parts per million at the start of the industrial revolution to their current concentration of over 370 parts per million. Anyone who can seriously argue about that change, which has occurred over a relatively short period when there had been little change over 420,000 years, is really rejecting reality. The committee concluded that the current rate of atmospheric CO2 accumulation is approximately two to three times that of the early 1960s. So I suppose the view that can be seen from that is that the effects of carbon in the atmosphere are actually accelerating.

In its fourth assessment report, the IPCC stated that warming of the global climate system is ‘unequivocal’, as demonstrated by increasing global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level. There was also extensive evidence that temperatures are rising, oceans are rising and Arctic ice is melting. As is set out in the report, the IPCC expressed the view:

… there is a greater than 90 percent probability that most of the warming since the mid twentieth century has been caused by the rapid increase in greenhouse gas concentrations resulting from human activities since the industrial revolution.

The IPCC has stated that human activities are responsible for emissions of four long-lived greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and halocarbons. These gases are chemically stable and persist in the atmosphere for up to centuries or longer. Emission of these gases therefore has a long term influence on climate. It will not go away. It goes on:

… The atmospheric concentration of CO2 … in 2005 exceed by far the natural range over the last 650,000 years.

If someone can argue that that is a mere coincidence, I think they are in denial. Despite the previous speaker saying that he is not a climate sceptic, he is going a long way to ignoring the evidence that was put before the committee, which I found overwhelmingly convincing.

Global greenhouse gas emissions increased by 70 per cent between 1970 and 2004. Carbon dioxide is considered to be the most important human caused greenhouse gas, with its annual emissions growing between 1970 and 2004 by about 80 per cent, from 21 to 38 gigatonnes. The global atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide increased from a pre-industrial value of about 280 parts per million to 379 parts per million in 2005. Similarly, methane increased from 715 parts per billion to 1,774 parts per billion, and nitrous oxide also increased.

Greenhouse gases reduce the radiation of heat from the earth’s atmosphere into space, trapping more heat in the atmosphere and thus increasing global temperatures. Australia has had an increase in temperature of about 0.9 degrees Celsius over the last 100 years, which in the
scheme of things is a very large increase over a very short time. Evidence to the committee is that:

Air temperature increases have been accompanied by marked declines in regional rainfall, particularly on the east and west coasts of the continent.

... ... ...

The CSIRO provided evidence on annual rainfall trends for the period 1950 to 2007, which illustrated a strong drying trend in south-west Western Australia and … in eastern Australia.

The committee was confident that some of the rainfall decreases that we are observing in southern Australia could at least in part be attributed to greenhouse gas emissions. It received evidence from Dr Ash that a one per cent decrease in rainfall can lead to a three per cent to four per cent decrease in run-off. A five per cent decrease in rainfall can lead to quite significant declines in run-off into storage areas and dams. In other words, a higher reduction in storage of rain from a smaller level of rainfall is occurring in Australia.

While the exact scale and speed of future changes in the global climate are still uncertain, the direction of change is considered to be clear. The IPCC concluded that continuing greenhouse gas emissions at or above current rates will cause further warming and induce larger changes in the global climate system during the 21st century than those observed during the 20th century. The CSIRO in particular pointed out:

… on our current track of emissions we are heading for a higher emissions scenario result for 2030 than that number reflects.

By 2070 predicted temperature increases could be between 1.8 and 3.4 degrees Celsius. That would have a dire impact on our natural environment, including some of our iconic environmental areas such as the Barrier Reef, some of the rainforests in the northern parts of Queensland as well as some of the more pristine areas in Tasmania such as Cradle Mountain.

Essentially what can be concluded from all this is that action is necessary in Australia. But it is also absolutely necessary that we take an international approach and work in unison with governments of other countries that are committed to reducing greenhouse gases and reducing the impact of climate change. The committee firmly recommended and endorsed Australia’s ratification of the Kyoto protocol, and I certainly share their view.

Debate (on motion by Mrs Gash) adjourned.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Blair Athol Accommodation and Support Program

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (6.35 pm)—I recently had the honour of attending an event to celebrate 30 years of service delivery by the Blair Athol Accommodation and Support Program on the southern Gold Coast. Thirty years ago, Tweed Coast Uniting Church parishioners Pat and Bill Bryant started taking tea, coffee and sandwiches to the local homeless people and they quickly realised that ongoing help was needed. A committee was then formed by the church, which resulted in Blair Athol.

Blair Athol is not just about emergency accommodation. The services offered included emergency accommodation for those over 18 years of age, crisis intervention, counselling, living skills, emotional support, practical assistance, advocacy, budgeting skills and financial management. It is the extra support programs that make Blair Athol’s program so successful. The aim always is to get people back into our community.
The dedicated staff work seven days a week, 24 hours a day and no-one is more dedicated than current manager Liz Fritz. Liz is the life and soul of Blair Athol, and I want, on behalf of our community, to thank her for the tremendous contribution she has made over the past 22 years. Liz started in the kitchen in 1987 because she wanted to get her foot in the door in welfare work. Twenty-two years later, she is more than an extremely capable manager. Apart from overseeing the day-to-day running of Blair Athol, she has been on a number of advisory committees including the previous Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness under the Howard government. I would like tonight to say congratulations to Liz and all her team for their commitment to those less fortunate in our Gold Coast community. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AR Bevis)—Order! I am advised that the clock normally does not operate for the 90 seconds. You will have to rely on me to pull you up when you get to the 90 seconds.

Petition: Higher Education

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (6.37 pm)—I am very pleased tonight to present the petition that you see before you, which is a national petition driven by the National Tertiary Education Industry Union’s ‘Our Universities Matter’ campaign that received 17,354 signatures from right around Australia. The petition asks the government to improve Commonwealth funding to reflect the real cost of delivering internationally competitive research and education as well as allowing each institution to follow its own particular mission, make access to higher education more equitable and affordable, improve student services at our universities and provide legislative protection for the distinctive characteristics of our universities—especially academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

I am very pleased to say that in response to this campaign and the recognition of the importance of higher education for a productive and fair Australia, the government has delivered for tertiary education in the budget. We have announced a $5.7 billion package over four years in response to the Bradley and Cutler reviews. This includes a student centred system which will enable 50,000 new students to commence a degree by 2013, a landmark increase to university indexation, a phased move to address the gap in funding for the indirect costs of research, major reforms to student income support, major investment in higher education research and VET infrastructure totalling $3 billion through the Education Investment Fund and additional recurrent funding of $2.1 billion over the forward estimates for higher education teaching, learning and research. This is a priority for this government. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AR Bevis)—The document will be forwarded to the Standing Committee on Petitions for its consideration. It will be accepted subject to confirmation by the committee that it conforms to the standing orders.

Gippsland Electorate: Youth Allowance

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (6.39 pm)—I wish to highlight for the benefit of the House a petition which is circulating in Gippsland. This petition is in direct response to the Rudd government’s flawed decision to change the eligibility criteria for students seeking to access the independent rate of youth allowance. I join with the petitioners in highlighting the simple fact that these changes to the youth allowance place another barrier to university participation for students in regional areas. They unfairly discriminate against students currently undertaking a
gap year and contradict other efforts to increase university participation for students from rural and regional Australia.

In the limited time I have available this evening, I urge the Minister for Education to immediately reconsider the decision, particularly given the impact it has on students who are already undertaking their gap year. The minister has attempted to justify this decision by claiming that more students would be able to access the youth allowance in the future under revised criteria for the income thresholds. Even if that is the case, there should be a guarantee that no students who are currently undertaking a gap year will be worse off under the proposed changes in the budget.

This is a decision remarkable for its arrogance and its contemptuous disregard for the hopes and aspirations of thousands of young Australians. These are the students who followed the rules as they applied when they finished their year 12 studies in 2008. They were told by their principals and careers counsellors, and even advised by Centrelink officers in some instances, that if they took a year off study and earned the $18,000 to $19,000 required under the eligibility criteria they would qualify for the independent rate of youth allowance. What has this government done? It has shattered the dreams of country students, their parents and their teachers midway through the gap year. It has pulled the rug out from under their feet, right when the students were starting to plan for the next move in their careers. If this is the education revolution then it amounts to a kick in the guts for country students. (Time expired)

**Brother Richard Doheny FSP**

Mr **BRADBURY** (Lindsay) (6.40 pm)—I recently attended the funeral of a great man, Brother Richard Doheny FSP, who passed away on 13 May 2009 at the age of 74. Brother Richard was a man of devotion and commitment. He was devoted to his God and committed to his sport and to shaping the minds of the young men he taught, coached and mentored. He taught at both primary and secondary schools, but for the largest part of his vocation was a revered and integral part of the Patrician Brothers’ College community at Fairfield, where he was my rugby league and cricket coach.

Brother Richard, who emigrated from Ireland in 1956 and was a member of the Patrician congregation for 56 years, will be remembered as an icon of the college and will always be held in the highest esteem by those who knew him and served with him. At a time when rugby league has received much bad publicity, the code would do well to highlight the great contribution of men like Brother Richard to the sport and to the development of character and respect amongst generations of young men. Among the many insights that he has left behind for us is the invocation, heralded at the beginning of many a sporting season: ‘Lads, you can’t fatten the pig on the day of the market.’

**Cowan Electorate: Lake Joondalup Lifestyle Village**

Mr **SIMPKINS** (Cowan) (6.41 pm)—I recently visited the Lake Joondalup Lifestyle Village in Ashby to see the public performance of the Village Vaudeville Group. The Village Vaudeville Group’s show was presented by the village’s social club. Although I have been to the Lake Joondalup Lifestyle Village on many occasions, this was the first time I had seen the show. I was greatly impressed. The vaudeville group comprised eight women and six men. They entertained the audience for more than two hours.
For a great show I would commend Lorrie Baillie, Bonnie Bonnick, Ian Carswell, Bill Davis, Glenis Fry, Mary Green, Wilf Green, Marcia Lockett, Joan Nelson, Pat Neenan, Frank Quicke, Helen Quicke, John Ruddle and Dave Whitehouse. I commend them as a group and for their solo performances as well. With their strong voices, they certainly did not struggle to hold a note. Although there were many people involved in the entire show, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the director, Helen Quicke; lighting and sound operator Wally Fry; and stage hands Inge and Peter Stark and Margaret Jones.

As with many amateur productions, not everything went according to plan. Prior to the performance I saw, musical director and pianist Ian Halliday was struck down with a serious eye problem. He is due to be operated upon tomorrow and I wish him all the best for the operation and a speedy recovery.

The MC for the evening was Ian’s wife, Jenny Halliday, and she did a great job, despite her obvious concern for her husband. It was fortunate that Lin Brown, an accomplished pianist, was able to step in for Ian and the show went ahead. I congratulate the Lake Joondalup Lifestyle Village Vaudeville Group for a fabulous performance.

Blair Electorate: Scenic Rim Community Hydrotherapy and Health Management Complex

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (6.43 pm)—On 17 May this year I was present at the turning of the first sod at the Scenic Rim Community Hydrotherapy and Health Management Complex at Elizabeth Terrace at Boonah. This is a project that is being delivered courtesy of the commitment of the local people, particularly the members of the Hydrotherapy Pool Project Committee; the cooperation of the Scenic Rim Regional Council; and the courage of the Rudd Labor government in terms of its Community Infrastructure Program. It is a wonderful project that will create jobs in Scenic Rim. It is a rural and regional area, and generally a conservative area, but the people in Fassifern Valley in Boonah have committed themselves to this cause. We gave $667,000 to the Scenic Rim council. They have kindly agreed to put $480,000 of that towards this project. Interestingly enough, the person who was present and turned the sod with me—I used my left foot; he used his right foot—was the National Party Mayor of Scenic Rim, Councillor John Brent, who could not speak highly enough of the Rudd Labor government’s commitment to infrastructure in the Fassifern Valley. It was a wonderful event. Also present there was the head of the local Liberal Party, Sel Pfeffer, who spoke highly of the commitment of the Labor Party and the Labor government to infrastructure in the rural area of Scenic Rim. It is a wonderful project. I commend it to the chamber.

Seniors Health Card

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (6.44 pm)—My speech is one of thanks to the thousands of pensioners and self-funded retirees in my electorate of Tangney who have put people power back on the political map. Before the election in 2007, the then Leader of the Opposition was claiming he had a plan for everything. What he did not mention was that he also had plans which he was not prepared to share with the people of Australia before the election—and no wonder. What he proposed was a direct attack on retired Australians who had worked hard all their lives and made sacrifices to provide for their retirement by taking out superannuation. In a clear case of the politics of envy writ large, the Labor government proposed to penalise these people by denying many of them access to the Commonwealth seniors health card at the very time of their lives when it is most needed. Over 3,000 people in Tangney signed post-
cards in support of pensioners and retirees, and I brought these cards to Canberra. I would like to thank these constituents for helping to defeat such a mean-spirited and despicable attack on self-funded retirees in this country.

Ms Ruby Wilson

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (6.46 pm)—I would like to say a few words in honour of Ruby Violet Wilson, a long-time member of the Labor Party, who died in March aged 95. Ruby joined the Labor Party when she moved from the country to Fremantle at the age of 17. When she passed away she was the longest serving member of the Fremantle branch. Her first experience of attending meetings was with her father and from that time on she became an essential part of every state and federal election campaign in WA. In recent years, Ruby was a much loved and inspiring fixture at the White Gum Valley Primary School booth, where she handed out how-to-vote cards and rallied the troops.

In honouring Ruby’s commitment, I want to make the general point that, while politics and political parties in Australia are often regarded with a good deal of cynicism, the truth is that those who become engaged in grassroots politics, whatever their stripe or flavour, are making a contribution to the strength of our democracy. Ruby Wilson raised her children as a single mother in a time when there was much less support or understanding for women in that position. It is no surprise then that she made a significant contribution to women’s policy and to women’s rights, particularly in her role as a founding member of the Fremantle women’s Labor movement. I know that my predecessor, Carmen Lawrence, had a great fondness and respect for Ruby. It is with the greatest respect and gratitude that I recognise the lifelong dedication of Ruby Wilson to the Labor Party in Western Australia and to Australian politics.

Franchising

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (6.47 pm)—The report of the inquiry into the franchise industry was handed to the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy on 1 December last year. That report contained bipartisan recommendations to strengthen the Franchising Code of Conduct. To date, nothing has come out of Minister Emerson’s office in response to the significant allegations raised through the inquiry, especially regarding the role of the ACCC. This failure to act on the substance of the report is tantamount to a failure of policy direction on the part of this Labor government, a failure that is unwarranted, unjustifiable and unacceptable. Ample information was made available to this inquiry. Previous Western Australian and South Australian inquiries revealed to the minister that he needs to take immediate action. Instead he chooses to sit on his hands and say nothing. The minister needs to show leadership on franchising matters.

I am also very concerned about the ACCC’s continued failure to stop rogue franchises. I find it extraordinary that, despite the myriad of cases brought to its attention over the years, the ACCC continues to stand by and watch as franchise systems collapse. By his silence the minister encourages the practice of churning, demonstrating that there is no will on the government side to reform the industry. Nearly six months have gone by and the minister still refuses to act decisively to protect vulnerable franchisees. If a stimulus has ever been needed then here is the opportunity. I call on the minister to immediately issue the government’s response to the inquiry and to establish a consultative and bipartisan working party to address the injustices that have been done to franchisees to prevent further injustices. This continuing delay does nothing to restore confidence in this government.
Australian Seabird Rescue

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (6.49 pm)—I want to commend Rochelle Ferris, the General Manager of the Australian Seabird Rescue Inc WildlifeLink Sanctuary, which is in North Creek Road in Ballina, for the wonderful work she is doing after stepping into the huge shoes of her late father, the much loved Lance Ferris, who was known as ‘the pelican man’. He was known as ‘the pelican man’ locally, nationally and internationally. Lance would agree that the best tribute to him would be for us to get rid of plastic bags from our waterways.

The environmental protection and conservation activities that are carried out by ASR include plastic bag use reduction campaigns encouraging environmentally friendly fishing practices, clean-up campaigns and removing marine debris from our waterways. Today Rochelle expressed her disappointment at being unsuccessful in attracting a small grant for voluntary organisations under the grants for voluntary environment and heritage organisations. I share her disappointment. I gave her a commitment that I will keep banging away and help her get some of the much needed funds that she deserves for the wonderful work that she does in our local community and nationally.

Australia’s Biggest Morning Tea

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (6.50 pm)—I rise to congratulate Ray and Shirley Wehbe, two of my local residents, for hosting Australia’s best and most delicious Biggest Morning Tea. Every year Ray and Shirley Wehbe open their beautiful home to host Australia’s Biggest Morning Tea and every year they raise thousands of dollars for cancer research. Last year they raised a remarkable $12,000 and this year seems likely to surpass all previous records. Ray and Shirley are local legends in my electorate of Parramatta, and over the years they have raised tens of thousands of dollars for a range of local charities. They are bridge builders who break down barriers and unify people, and it is an honour to call them my friends. When you are at a Wehbe function, you feel the strength of family and community.

One in two Australians will be diagnosed with cancer before the age of 85. Last year Australia’s Biggest Morning Tea raised a mind-boggling $10 million, money raised one dollar at a time by individuals like Shirley and Ray—people making a difference by helping to fund the Cancer Council’s research, prevention, education and support services. I would also like to thank the families of Christ the King School in Oatlands, who dropped in, in great numbers, for some bacon and eggs before school, and the dozens of companies in Parramatta who encouraged their workers to drop in for breakfast before work. And a special thank you goes to Five Dock Physiotherapy for their tremendous personal contribution. Ray and Shirley Wehbe are Parramattans of the first order, and on behalf of me personally and the Parramatta community, I thank them for their services.

St Dominic’s College

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (6.52 pm)—I rise to offer my congratulations to St Dominic’s College, Penrith, which this year celebrates its golden jubilee. The school held a number of commemorative events earlier this month to mark 50 years since the first classes were held. St Dominic’s was established as a boys’ school in 1959 by the Christian Brothers. It started with an enrolment of only 72 students housed in a handful of very simple buildings. It has now grown into a thriving school community that prides itself on its academic and sporting achievements. St Dominic’s has produced a host of stars, including rugby league greats Greg...
Alexander and Luke Rooney and former Socceroos star Luke Casserly. I was hono
red to be invited recently to the opening of the school’s auditorium and new science block, which in
corporates some of the latest technology to create for students a comfortable, modern learning
environment that would surely impress the founding brothers. I congratulate St Dominic’s
community, the Christian Brothers and the current principal, Brother Jeff Regan, on the con
tribution that the college has made to educating young people in our local community. I wish
the school continuing success into the future.

**International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers**

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (6.53 pm)—As a former United Nations peacekeeper and as the
Chair of the Australia-UN Parliamentary Group, I am moved to note that 29 May is the Inter
ational Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. UN peacekeepers, who currently number
around 110,000, include military personnel contributed by UN member states as well as civil-
ians. They are engaged not only in maintaining peace and security but also in building the
political, social and economic infrastructure required to ensure that conflict zones can make
the lasting transition to peace. Australia has been a strong supporter of UN peacekeeping op-
erations since the first mission in 1947 and is one of the top 20 contributors to the UN peace-
keeping budget. Last month Australia’s contribution to UN peacekeeping was recognised with
an exhibition at the UN headquarters in New York entitled ‘Australian peacekeepers at the
United Nations’. It is worth reflecting on the fact that the UN’s total peacekeeping budget is
US$6.8 billion, or half of one per cent of global military spending, leading one to the undeni-
able conclusion that building and keeping the peace is overwhelmingly cheaper than the pur-
suit of war. I want to pay tribute to all UN peacekeepers, some of whom, like my friend Jean-
Selim Kanaan, to whom I referred in my first speech, have tragically been killed in UN peace
operations, while others continue to put their lives at risk in the hope of a better world. I know
that members join with me in recognising the importance of peacekeeping and the Interna-
tional Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AR Bevis)—Order! It being nearly 6.55 pm, in accor-
dance with standing order 192A the time for members’ statements has concluded.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS**

**ADF Personnel and ‘Undeclared Operations’**

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Somlyay:

That the House:

(1) recognises and commends service undertaken by all those who have served the Australian Defence
Force (ADF) and the people of Australia in the name of Australia;

(2) takes note of service undertaken by ADF personnel on ‘Undeclared Operations’ on behalf of the
Australian Government and the Australian people;

(3) commends personnel on ‘Undeclared Operations’ for their duty on behalf of all Australians by
working to serve, protect and defend Australian citizens against perceived threats;

(4) acknowledges the risks associated with ‘Undeclared Operations’ and notes that the personnel re-
cruited understood the significant risks involved in their work; and

(5) calls upon the Department of Defence to reconsider declaring such missions as ‘Active Service’.

Mr SOMLYAY (Fairfax) (6.55 pm)—While this motion is expressed in broad terms, it is
specifically about recognition of those Royal Australian Navy submarine personnel who par-
participated in ‘intelligence collection missions’ in the period from 1978 to 1992. I am pleased
that the member for Bradfield and former defence minister, Brendan Nelson, will be speaking
on this motion as well. As defence minister he came to my electorate and met with one of
these submarine commanders, so he has an intimate knowledge of the subject. I note, Mr
Deputy Speaker, that you will also speak on this motion.

We expect much of the members of our armed forces. In return, the Australian government,
on behalf of the people, must recognise that service. This motion seeks to do just that. As a
nation we need to recognise appropriately those who served their country in these specific
missions between 1978 and 1992. Successive governments have failed to act. This motion
seeks the recognition of those RAN submarine personnel who participated in these missions.

During the period 1978 to 1992, the Royal Australian Navy submarines conducted intelli-
gence collection missions in areas to the north and north-west of Australia and in areas out-
side of Australia’s sphere of influence but in areas of perceived threat. These missions were
conducted at the height of the Cold War. They were also conducted as war patrols. Submarin-
ers have told me that the then Chief of the Defence Force acknowledged this fact by his in-
structions to his commanding officers stating that ‘in the event of capture by foreign nationals
the Commanding Officer was to seek POW status’. I am advised that the CDF believed that
such status, if granted, could result in better treatment for the men. POW, of course, means
‘prisoner of war’. These were certainly not normal peacetime operations or exercises and this
was definitely not the normal practice. These were warlike operations.

The submariners who undertook these missions in this period have at no stage been permit-
ted to discuss these secret missions in any detail. It is ironic perhaps that the matter was dis-
cussed in great detail in an article by Geoffrey Barker in the Financial Review Magazine
dated December 2003. A number of books on the Cold War activities of the US and British
submarine forces have now also been published. These submarine missions were ‘undeclared
operations’, with only the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence of the day having
knowledge within government of the operations. These operations were not included in any
defence exercise program and were controlled exclusively by the Chief of the Defence Force.

These intelligence collection missions were only stopped, according to this article by Geo-
frey Barker, by the then Minister for Defence and the then Prime Minister in 1992 because
one of the submarines on such a mission apparently came close to creating a diplomatic inci-
dent. These missions lasted up to five weeks or more, and a policy of total electronic emission
silence was imposed during such a mission. Geoffrey Barker in his article points out that life
on these submarines was lonely and isolated, as well as perilous. While no-one can take away
from the fact that it takes a special person to take up the challenge as a member of a subma-
rine crew, I emphasise that these particular missions were different from normal peacetime
exercises. When on these secret missions the submariners had no communications with fam-
ily. Personal bad news was withheld from crew members until patrols ended.

With intelligence collection as their priority task, their whereabouts while on the task was
unknown to anyone but themselves. If, while ‘collecting’, a submarine had suffered an acci-
dent or had been attacked and thus damaged or sunk, the search area for the ADF to find the
submarine would have covered millions of square miles in foreign waters.

Again, Geoffrey Barker notes that despite the submarine being designed to accommodate a
crew of five officers and the 57 ratings, these missions contained more than 75 people on

MAIN COMMITTEE
board. In addition to the normal complement there were always some submarine service trainees and civilians operating specialised intelligence collection equipment. He noted that during the patrols perhaps not more than 10 people on board would know the boat’s location. A curtain was placed around the chart table to discourage curious crew members. This is not fantasy from an Ian Fleming novel; this is what our Australian submariners endured. These operations were conducted in warlike conditions, not peacetime exercise—in other words, active service.

Their families, or the general public, may never have known if an entire RAN submarine crew was lost at sea or was in a foreign prison camp, had one of these submarines been compromised during such a mission. During these secret missions at the height of the Cold War our submarines entered other nations’ areas of interest and were told they could penetrate territorial waters of those nations if the intelligence collection potential warranted such action. This was effectively authorisation for that submarine to commit a hostile act. Perhaps this is why these men have been denied the recognition they deserve, which is active service. Those submarines were part of the dark side of the politics of the Cold War. Their service to the national interest should be recognised and not just shoved aside and put in the too-hard basket because we might upset some countries who are now our friends.

In Australia we have a system of recognising those who participated in active service and served their country. They are recognised publicly by the award of the Australian Active Service Medal. To quote from the official Australian government website:

The Australian Active Service Medal recognises service of Australian Defence Force …

The medal is awarded with a clasp to denote the prescribed operation.

This medal has been awarded to our service men and women who have served in areas such as Kuwait, Cambodia, Vietnam, East Timor, Namibia and Somalia. The main difference is that these operations were in the public arena whereas the submarine operations were part of the Cold War. The Australian government deployed them in the national interest and their service should be recognised.

As a member of the Howard government, I was disappointed that the service of these crews was not recognised by that government in a timely way. Since the election of the Rudd government I have continued to bring this matter to the minister’s attention, to have this service by these submariners recognised. This is nothing to do with party politics; this is about justice. The correct and appropriate recognition should be either to award an Australian Active Service Medal with Special Operations clasp to the crews on these missions—thus granting full active service status—or to recognise submariners under the terms of the award of a new medal similar to that being discussed for SAS personnel for their special operations in the 1980s, which apparently includes active service recognition. It would not be difficult to classify these special operation missions and grant active service status for our submarine personnel. We do not expect that submariners will face similar conditions in the future to those which they faced in the Cold War, but if that did happen in some future era submariners could expect recognition of their service.

I am happy to say that today I have been advised there has been real progress in the process of recognition of the missions undertaken by these submariners. This is the right thing for
Mr BIDGOOD (Dawson) (7.04 pm)—I rise to support the honourable member’s motion that this House recognises and commends service undertaken by all those who have served the Australian Defence Force and the people of Australia in the name of Australia. No official role as the member for Dawson makes me prouder than honouring our men and women in uniform, whether it be by a richly deserved medal of service or by welcoming home troops from active operation in the Middle East and elsewhere with a handshake and a ‘Welcome home; we are proud of you’.

I have participated both in my electorate and in Townsville as a representative of the federal government and the minister on many occasions. I have been able to say thank you and look our men and women in uniform directly in the eye and say, ‘Yes, we are proud of you. Well done and thank you. You serve our nation with honour and integrity. You deserve the respect of our nation and I know from my own experience that you have the respect of other nations with whom we have had joint operations.’ Army, Air Force and Navy play a vital role in the defence of our nation. Our regular and reserve forces form the backbone of our national defence.

I further feel a sense of pride in our men and women in uniform after seeing firsthand their active service overseas just recently on a parliamentary program I undertook to the Middle East. I spent 10 days on the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program with five colleagues. We went into various live operations. One of them, which was particularly pleasing for me, was doing reconnaissance and surveillance for quite a few hours on an Orion P3 and having firsthand demonstrations of all the surveillance equipment and everything that is on-board. Truly, we have some excellent technology being operated by highly skilled men and women. They really do serve us with integrity and honour.

It was particularly pleasing to go out to the Warramunga, an Anzac class warship, for three days and experience operations there as they were watching what they call the ‘hash highway’, with the poppy season in Afghanistan in full bloom and the harvest on. I was able to watch them monitoring the movements and transition of those drugs. It was particularly pleasing to meet someone from the electorate of Dawson—the chef. I was very impressed with the quality and the nutritional value of the food he was serving. I was particularly pleased to spend time with many other Queenslanders on that ship. I happened to notice that almost half the ship’s company were Queenslanders, which was even more pleasing.

It was a fantastic community experience because a ship is a whole community. Looking at all the facilities—the living and working conditions of our men and women in uniform—we must never forget that they are workers like any other worker in society and they deserve health and safety conditions and top-quality equipment, terms and conditions just as the rest of our society does.

Our men and women serve the government and the people of Australia. We should recognise their service in whichever form that takes, whether it can be revealed or not revealed. The most important thing anyone can do in life is recognise and appreciate the service of others to the community and for the common good of the nation. I believe the government recognises the service in many ways, including through an honours and awards system. In warlike situations the Australian Active Service Medal or the campaign medals, for example the Afghan-
stan Medal or the Iraq Medal, give recognition to those who have endured long and arduous periods in war operations. For non-warlike operations the Australian Service Medal and the Service Medal with a Special Ops clasp are also awarded.

An election commitment of the Rudd Labor government was to establish an independent tribunal to consider longstanding defence honours and awards issues. This was established administratively in July 2008, with legislation to be introduced this year. This tribunal has already completed two inquiries and another five are underway.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we cannot do enough to recognise and appreciate the gallantry and the service in whatever aspect it may be—on the front line or behind the scenes. Our military services are a whole community and every part of that community is important and deserves to be recognised and appreciated. I can think of no better example of this than one of my constituents, Keith Payne, who received the VC. He is an outstanding man, and it has been a pleasure to get to know him, to hear his stories of bravery and of the tremendous work he has done over the years since Vietnam serving people across this nation. He truly is a people’s hero, one who has been recognised and appreciated around Australia. I am so glad that people like Keith are being recognised. I continue to say that, whoever they are, whether they are prominent people like Keith or people behind the scenes like the chef who comes from Andergrove in Mackay, they all deserve to be recognised and appreciated equally. I commend the motion.

Dr NELSON (Bradfield) (7.11 pm)—I rise to support very strongly this motion. I commend the member for Fairfax for bringing it to the attention of the House and for his tireless, loyal and deep commitment to seeing that there is appropriate recognition for Australia’s submariners. In relation to that, I say to the member for Dawson that, whilst respecting what he said, submariners are not workers like any other Australian worker, which is why we have this motion before us. The recognition of Australia’s submariners, their service and sacrifice is, in itself, a metaphor for Australia’s history in submarines.

In 1914, three years after the formation of the Royal Australian Navy, the first two submarines were delivered from British shipyards to Australia. AE1 was lost off New Guinea but AE2, which would be known, sadly, to only a relatively small number of Australians, undertook that heroic mission through the Dardanelles on the morning of 25 April, 1915, getting through the narrow passage, the currents and the fortifications to sink a Turkish cruiser and to follow the orders it was given to ‘run amok’ and, five days after embarking on that campaign, to be disabled and scuttled. But how many Australians would know of it? And the truth of it is that this is a maritime nation. Maintaining a strong, technologically advanced submarine capability is vital. I commend the government for recognising that in its recent white paper by expanding Australia’s submarine fleet. This country has had 23 submarines commissioned since the establishment of the Royal Australian Navy in 1911. As Sir Winston Churchill said: Of all the branches of men in the forces, there is none which shows more devotion and faces grimmer perils than submariners.

There is an underlying stress in submarine service that will always be with us, and that stress is composed of habitability, long periods away from home, personal communication issues and communication whilst at sea. Submarine work is also hazardous and in some cases downright dangerous, particularly for those who are the subject of this motion in Oberon class submarines. The work Australian submarine crews undertake is known to very few in the...
Navy, to very few in Defence and, I can assure you, as a former defence minister, to very, very few in government. In fact, I would like it noted that, as a former defence minister, I am speaking in support of the motion but, for reasons that are obvious, I cannot speak specifically about my own experiences and operations that are being and have been performed by Australian submariners, but I am making a point of being here to support this resolution.

During the Cold War, the Oberon class boats undertook long and dangerous missions. Yes, we were not at war in any conventional sense, nor were the submarines engaged in peace-keeping operations. They were not authorised to use force, but had the presence of those submarines been detected and had they been captured, an international incident would have been triggered. What, for example, might have been the consequences for these men—indeed, for the nation they served—had they been detected under rules of engagement that allowed for hot pursuit of intelligence targets or for being in extremely close proximity to surface ships of other nations? It should not be necessary to paint a picture, particularly for those who lived through the Cold War.

It is very difficult to know precisely how many Australian men—and, more recently, women—have served in our submarines but it is at least 1,000. The Oberon class served this country from 1965 to 2000. We heard from the member for Fairfax that there were as many as 75 onboard in extraordinarily cramped and potentially dangerous circumstances doing what they had been asked to do by their country. I am very strongly of the view that both sides of parliament need to work earnestly to break through the intransigence of the military to see that these men, as they were from the Oberon class days, are recognised for the service that they undertook on the part of our country.

There is much injustice in life and there is even more in the recognition of military service. Every Australian man and woman that wears or has worn this uniform has given a special service to this nation. It is unfair to compare them, whether it is the cook on HMAS Warra-munga or whether it is Keith Payne VC. For some of our personnel who are appropriately and rightly awarded an Active Service Medal, the comparison with what was done in submarines where they are denied this is one that I find difficult to justify, and I strongly support the resolution.

Mr BEVIS (Brisbane) (7.16 pm)—I join with the other speakers in support of the service men and women of Australia. There would be few things that I think all members of this parliament would agree with in such a committed way other than the proposition that we should be providing as much support to our defence men and women as our nation can muster. We tend to focus on the men and women of our defence forces when they are on active deployment in high-profile activities. Unfortunately, we do not provide the same focus to those people engaged in less high profile activities, nor—dare I say—do we provide the same degree of concern for them years later, when we should. There are many examples that go back quite some years that bring none of us great glory.

I think of the situation of the Long Tan soldiers who waited many years to gain a proper recognition for their quite remarkable and heroic efforts on that day in August 1966. There were ongoing issues associated with the British Commonwealth occupation forces—those Australians who participated in the early days after the cessation of hostilities in Japan and who occupied territory in Japan in quite difficult circumstances. There is the Australian Women’s Land Army—I have to say that I did not know a great deal about them until 1995,
when we had the Australia Remembers program. That was an absolutely wonderful program which my old mate Con Sciacca deserved great credit for. I vividly remember going to a number of functions with these ladies, who were then in their late 60s and early 70s. They were very sprightly ladies in their 70s. Think of them 50 years earlier: they really did the nation proud. They were wonderful people.

We are going back many years in dealing with those issues. With respect to the matter of most concern to the member for Fairfax, those people who were engaged in activities which do not always—for good reason—find their way into the public consciousness, I think it needs to be said that all security forces engage in activities which—for very good reason—are not the sort of things that are publicised or that are heralded in public or even in a semiprivate environment. As the former Minister for Defence has attested to, even within government, few are familiar with some of these things. That is not to say that there is anything untoward or improper in those activities. They are properly conducted, authorised activities.

For the record, I do want to say that the wording of the resolution unfortunately refers to ‘undeclared operations’. That can be a bit evocative. Those who follow Hollywood movies might interpret that in a way which I am sure the member for Fairfax did not intend, but in the reporting of this I think it is important to comprehend that we are not, here, talking about the sorts of things that Hollywood likes to glamorise in some of its movies as ‘undeclared’ military activities.

As I say, these are legitimate, authorised activities which for good reason, as with every other security force in the world, are not publicised. Those engaged in those activities do deserve proper recognition and, along with Long Tan, along with the Women’s Land Army and many of these others, it has been a tortuously slow process. We are talking decades—and inexplicably, I have to say. I was intimately involved in the pursuit of recognition medals for the Long Tan soldiers, and it amazed me how difficult it was to get what seemed to me a blatantly just outcome. These are issues that are being properly progressed at the moment. There are within government necessary reviews in process. I would like to think that, as we were recently able to resolve the Long Tan medal issue, we can deal with many of these outstanding matters as well.

Can I also add my words of endorsement for all those who have served in our submarine fleet. Our submarine capability is critically important for an island nation such as Australia. I wholeheartedly endorse the words of the member for Bradfield, the former Minister for Defence, in respect of that. It is an absolutely essential capability, and the men and now women who serve on those submarines are special people—every single one of them—and they all deserve special recognition.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (7.21 pm)—I rise in the Main Committee this evening to support the motion of the member for Fairfax particularly as it relates to submariners, and especially those who served in the Oberon class during the Cold War period. I must say, as a former veterans’ affairs minister—and the former Minister for Defence on our side is also here—that we have all had to come to grips with this issue from time to time. We have just heard from the Chair of the Defence Subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade that throughout both sides of the House being in government the issue of recognition for service has sometimes been a very difficult one. I think we would all agree that there have been anomalies from time to time. Issues can be overlooked, but as
time goes on the important job that we have to do is to ensure there is fairness and equity and that those have served their country in uniform in the Australian Defence Force are duly recognised for that service.

We have just heard the member for Brisbane say, and I am sure we would all agree, that submariners really are a very special breed of people. I have been inside a submarine but I have never dived in one. I am not quite sure how I would react to being down there for days or weeks on end. They are very special people and it is a very, very special capability. The capacity of submarines, including our new Collins class submarines, to get into positions that can retrieve information undetected is a resource that we should not take lightly. It is not only the submarine itself; it is the skill of the submariners in knowing what to do—how to manoeuvre quietly and secretly, without detection—that plays a vital role in the security of our nation.

I want to touch on the issue of undeclared operations for submariners during the Cold War. When these submariners were recruited I am sure they were aware at the time of the special nature of their operations and I am sure they would have become aware that they were operating in an environment during the Cold War where, had they been detected or picked up, they would have been subject to not only capture but also perhaps execution. If you look at some of the material that has come to light over the past few years, while there is very scant information, some of these submariners were only metres away from what would have been considered a not-so-friendly ship or other dangerous situations, collecting vital information for our intelligence services.

At the time that they were sent on these missions, the only people who would have been aware of it, as the former defence minister would be aware, would have been the Prime Minister, the defence chief, the defence minister and perhaps the foreign minister. It was only a very few people who would have been aware of where these operations were to go. They were at the time a very special operation. Albeit these undeclared operations may not have been considered warlike for the recognition of the Australian Active Service Medal, we should consider them to be a special operation that needs to be recognised. I am sure that is what the personnel are seeking—I commend them for their operations and for the skill that they had—let alone the families that were back home knowing that their loved ones were away on an operation and not even they would know where they were. That was the nature of the operation.

I would support the member for Fairfax. I hope that we are able to find a way to recognise the service of those submariners who were operating in a secret environment during that Cold War period, for, without the work that they did, perhaps other circumstances could have arisen against these countries that could have led to an engagement with us. Let us ensure that this little group who did a very special operation for us during that Cold War period are duly recognised. I support the member for Fairfax and commend him for bringing forward this motion to the Committee.

Ms Saffin (Page) (7.27 pm)—I rise to give strong support to the motion moved by the member for Fairfax and note his commitment to furthering this issue. The motion has been put forward in five paragraphs. Paragraph (1) speaks to the general nature of what the honourable member is aiming to achieve, and paragraph (5) to the particular, which includes the submariners that all the other members have mentioned in their contributions. I will restate paragraph (1):
recognises and commends service undertaken by all those who have served the Australian Defence Force … and the people of Australia in the name of Australia …

I know that every member in this House from every political persuasion would support that very strongly, as we do. Paragraph (5), and this is really the nub of the motion, seeks to secure recognition in particular for the submariners—I would take it as all that flows for those who served our nation defending our national interest through the Australian Defence Force in all manner of operations—that have not to date attracted the recognition they so rightly deserve.

There is a whole lot of history to this issue. As the honourable member and other members making contributions know, this matter did not arise yesterday. Many people have been seized with this matter over a number of years.

The particular class of personnel that the motion refers to were mentioned in the Clarke review. They were recommended for inclusion and, as the honourable member pointed out, they were not included to be picked up there. I note that the government has uplifted that from the Clarke review. I have not looked at that particular review for some time but I am advised that it is recommendation 31 and that it talks specifically about service on submarines on special operations. That is what we are trying to achieve here. That work we are talking about is exacting, and I find it very difficult to conceive of being in a submarine. As has been said here, those who undertake that work are really special people. I want to honour the work that they do. They deserve absolutely every recognition that we can give.

I want to make special mention here of the Nature of Service Review, which is still underway and gathering momentum. I know that, to those who have served, all of these things should have been resolved yesterday. But the fact is that the Nature of Service Review is taken very seriously by all. As the honourable member for Fairfax said in his contribution, there is serious progress and hopefully there will be an ability to report some of the progress to the House. I want to make some points about the Nature of Service Review, which was formed in July 2002 to address deficiencies in the process for determining the nature of service classification for ADF military operations. There are currently 91 claims before the Nature of Service Review team covering 30 different periods of service. Resolution of these cases requires detailed research, including the extraction and examination of archived material. This can very time consuming, particularly since the Nature of Service Review team has been directed to use the legislation in vogue at the time of the period of service in question, which stands to reason. Expedient administrative management of these cases, however, does not guarantee a quick resolution—and that is what we all want—as the majority of cases also require input from agencies outside Defence and over which Defence has limited control. As a result, a specific time frame for completing each submission is not always feasible. In addition to the 91 externally generated representations, the Nature of Service Review team is addressing five internally generated requests and 15 requests from the Department of Veterans’ Affairs for review of past operations activity. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (7.32 pm)—As shadow parliamentary secretary with portfolio responsibility for medals, I want the House to know and understand that I completely support the recognition of the service that these submariners have given to our country. The secretive nature of the operations that they were involved in has meant that many brave and deserving individuals have not been publicly recognised for their service, which in many cases was so dangerous and hazardous as to be considered warlike, using the current terminology. If any-
thing was active service, this was—and I do not understand why the Defence Force has not been able to move quickly on this. I wrote to my opposite number in the government some time ago but just got a holding response, and it seems to have been on hold since. This needs to be resolved.

There are obviously some difficult and technically complex issues to be resolved, as review decisions are strictly based on the legislation or executive orders which applied at the time of service only. Subsequent changes to definitions of service and the associated entitlements conferred cannot be used to support retrospective claims. Hence a great deal of research is needed to uncover the governing circumstances under which personnel were sent on so-called ‘undeclared operations’. But the British have a very good system of dealing with this, and we should adopt that model so that these men who have served their nation so well in such dangerous situations can be honoured in the appropriate way.

Despite the difficulties and the necessary research involved, the government has a moral and contractual obligation to provide special recognition and, where appropriate, additional benefits to those who serve on dangerous operations at great personal risk. This defines the nature of ‘active service’, and it would be a terrible injustice to deny those who meet the qualifications their due recognition. Hence the opposition is calling on the Department of Defence and the minister to expedite the review of the claims currently with the Nature of Service Review team. It is also vitally important that the minister is transparent in his decision making for the benefit of the remainder of the wider veteran community.

I thank the member for Fairfax for bringing this motion to the House and I thank him for giving me the opportunity to express the opposition’s strong support for resolving this issue as quickly as possible. Although I detect bipartisan support here in the chamber this evening, if for some reason this were to go on until there were a change of government then the opposition, as the new government, would move immediately to resolve this particular issue.

The first part of the motion tonight recognises and commends service undertaken by all those who have served in the ADF. I just finish with the recognition of a small group of men and women who do not publicly get recognition very often. They are part of what is called Operation Paladin. Paladin is the longest serving United Nations operation in the world. It deploys military observers who work and live in the Middle East, in Lebanon and Syria, on the Golan Heights. Their object, really, is to do nothing. That sounds odd, but in fact by doing nothing they do everything. They keep the peace and they make sure that Hezbollah and Israel remain at arm’s length; they make sure that the Syrians and the Israelis remain at arm’s length. They do a fabulous job.

The point of mentioning Operation Paladin is to say that 27 governments have troops represented in that operation and, head and shoulders above all else, Australians are considered the most professional and the best trained of all the soldiers who participate. Also understand that it is not just men who are there; it is women too. I was fortunate to meet two of our military observers a month and a half ago, one in Damascus and one in Beirut. They are every bit as good as the men who are there. They do a mighty job for our country, and I thank them for their service.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.
Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Ripoll:

That the House:

(1) notes that:
   (a) chronic disease is one of the country’s most critical health challenges;
   (b) more than 50 per cent of the Australian population already suffers from a chronic or long term condition of some form; and
   (c) the rise of these diseases poses both a major risk to the long term health of millions of Australians and a frontline economic challenge; and

(2) supports:
   (a) the Government’s continued commitment to preventative health strategies and closing the gap in indigenous life expectancy;
   (b) initiatives to support the role of the primary care system on our local communities; and
   (c) the increased role the private sector currently plays in delivering health and medical services.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (7.37 pm)—One of the most widely debated and, it seems, unresolved issues facing all Australians in some form is chronic disease. This country is revered for its outdoor lifestyle, sporting endeavours and the image of the lean, bronzed Aussie, but it must come as no surprise that chronic disease is a very real and urgent issue that needs addressing. Australia is a healthy country by international standards, but we need to understand the consequences of the fact that around 32 per cent of the population’s illnesses are caused by tobacco, obesity, harmful and high use of alcohol, physical inactivity, poor diet and the associated risk factors of high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. We tend to refer to these epidemics in an almost glib fashion, with little regard to their individual complexity, cultural pervasiveness or the ultimate social and economic cost.

Some startling facts that will no doubt put this into perspective are as follows. It is estimated that three million people alone will have diabetes by 2030. Cardiovascular diseases including heart disease, stroke and blood vessel disease are the leading cause of death in Australia, for almost 50,000 people died as a result of cardiovascular disease in 2004. Skin cancer accounts for around 81 per cent of all new cancers diagnosed each year in Australia. Around 380,000 people are treated for skin cancer each year and approximately 1,400 people die from it. There are around 10,000 new cases of bowel cancer diagnosed each year and around 4½ thousand deaths from it.

Couple these statistics with our ageing population and the life expectancy gap of Indigenous Australians and you soon understand that more must be done. As such, we have seen the establishment of the Preventative Health Taskforce and a men’s health policy that is the first of its kind in Australia. The Rudd Labor government is focused on deliverable outcomes. The government is about providing preventative health programs and strategies and focusing on the trifecta of chronic disease caused by obesity, tobacco and the excessive consumption of alcohol. Sadly, an impending outcome of chronic disease is that the life expectancy of children in Australia today will be lower by two years if current levels of lifestyle abuse continue.

With facts like this underlying the importance of taking preventative action, government and community must work together to promote a healthy future for all Australians. The national Preventative Health Taskforce has been providing the government with evidence based
advice on the framework for the preventative health partnerships between the Commonwealth and the states and territories and to develop a National Preventative Health Strategy. We have also seen the release of the task force paper entitled Australia: the healthiest country by 2020, which was created to kick-start debate on a number of targets which it says can be achieved by 2020. These are halting and reversing the rise in the number of people who are obese or overweight, reducing the prevalence of daily smoking to nine per cent or less, reducing the prevalence of harmful drinking for all Australians by 30 per cent and contributing to closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The paper outlines options for reform, rather than making final recommendations.

Finally, I want to specifically mention Inala Primary Care, the local primary care provider in my electorate of Oxley, of which I am a community board member and which is working very hard to deliver health and medical services within our community and to relieve the pressure on our hospital system. CEO Cathy Brown and her dedicated team of doctors, nurses and administrative staff are doing a great job, and the service they provide in primary health care is absolutely first class. The service began in 2007 and not only will continue to provide bulk-billing services but has opened up new opportunities for the University of Queensland to expand community teaching, promote healthier lifestyles and place greater emphasis on preventative health care to the wider community. This is a great initiative that forms part of an integrated Inala health hub, a one-stop shop for all our local health needs. It is also great to recognise the private sector as a place that can contribute to further developments in both primary and community health care, and I look forward to working with them to deliver results both now and into the future.

Preventative health care works and, over the past 25 years, the introduction of policies to discourage smoking has resulted in the use of tobacco products in Australia being at a historic low. I think everyone would agree that good health policy is also good economic policy. But let us not rest there, because much more needs to be done. The changes in lifestyle, policy and strategic policies needed in the future will require a concerted effort across the community, involving individuals, governments, industry, media and non-government organisations alike. Organisations such as Inala Primary Care are at the forefront of that primary healthcare delivery and are an essential part of the battle that we all face in dealing with one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mrs VALE (Hughes)** (7.42 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion raised by the member for Oxley. According to the World Health Organisation, chronic diseases are diseases of long duration and generally slow progression. Chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes are by far the leading cause of mortality in the world, representing 60 per cent of all deaths. In Australia chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, depression, arthritis and cardiovascular disease are among the main causes of death and disability.

According to the National Health Priority Action Council, the burden of chronic conditions is expected to reach 80 per cent of healthcare expenditure by 2020. This is despite the fact that chronic conditions are also amongst the most preventable health conditions in the world. In November 2005, the Australian Health Ministers Conference endorsed a national strategic policy approach to manage and improve chronic disease prevention and care in the Australian population. The proposed national approach to chronic disease prevention and management
comprises three complementary components: (1) national chronic disease strategy, which provides the overarching framework of national direction for improving chronic disease prevention and care across Australia; (2) national service improvement frameworks that cover the national health priority areas of asthma, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and osteoporosis; and (3) the blueprint for nationwide surveillance of chronic diseases and associated determinants.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognise the work of the Friendship Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation based in my electorate and dedicated to working with the community to improve quality of life for carers and people disadvantaged by chronic illness or injury and/or long-term social displacement. The foundation has a large focus on carers in the Australian community. We can clearly understand that people suffering from chronic health conditions rely heavily upon the selfless and untiring work of their carers. In support of carers, the Friendship Foundation brought to my attention a report from Deakin University, Carers Australia and Australian Unity entitled *The wellbeing of Australians: carer health and wellbeing*.

This report tells us that (1) carers face high levels of depression, anxiety and stress; (2) carers develop illness and injuries brought about by caring for others; (3) carers often neglect their own health, fitness and nutrition because they do not have the time or money to take care of themselves as well; and (4) many working carers live in uncertainty and fear that they will lose their jobs if their loved one needs more intensive care.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to support an application by the Friendship Foundation for funding under the Department of Health and Ageing Chronic Disease Self-management/Lifestyle and Risk Modification Grants Program. The foundation sought to build a more interactive self-management care model than is currently in place to support, prevent and self-manage chronic conditions in conjunction with healthcare professionals in my electorate. Unfortunately, the Friendship Foundation were notified today that they were unsuccessful in their application for funding under this program. As I believe there is a real need within our community for the support envisaged by the Friendship Foundation, I will continue to support them in their initiatives to meet this unmet need.

I would also like to pay special attention to part 2(c) of this motion, which mentions the role of the private sector in delivering health and medical services. Unfortunately, 1.7 million Australians will be immediately affected by changes to rebates for private health insurance and will face either higher premium payments or higher tax payments through the Medicare levy. Those with insurance face higher premiums as others drop out, or they will have to lower their cover. And those relying on the public health system will face longer hospital waiting times and queues. There is an alternative. I ask that the Prime Minister recognise the importance of the private sector and accept the coalition’s suggestion to increase taxes on cigarettes instead of changing the health insurance rebates.

In conclusion, Australia’s healthcare system must be able to respond in an appropriate way to the challenge of chronic disease. Failure to prevent, detect and treat chronic disease at an optimal stage in its course impacts on affected individuals and their families and carers in terms of pain and suffering and involves the whole Australian community in higher healthcare costs. I thank the member for Oxley for bringing this matter to the attention of the chamber.
Mr HALE (Solomon) (7.47 pm)—I thank the member for Oxley for putting this motion before the chamber. I am delighted to speak in support of the points he has made. Chronic disease is one of our country’s most critical health challenges. Statistics tell us that more than half our population suffers from some form of chronic or long-term condition. With that sort of number, I would suggest that everyone in this place has been personally impacted by chronic disease. I know I have. I have had very good mates in Darwin die as a result of having a chronic disease—heart disease, diabetes and cancer. A good mate of mine is currently battling with chronic kidney disease. I played footy with this bloke. He is a great guy. He has a wife and young family, and my thoughts are with him whilst he goes through his personal battle.

The impact of chronic and long-term conditions on the sufferers, their families, their friends and their colleagues is devastating. It is life changing. It turns your world upside down and it turns everyone’s world upside down. Major chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease, depression and cancer all have devastating impacts. The life expectancy of children in Australia today could be cut by two years if current levels of obesity and people being overweight continue. The Australian Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance suggest that chronic illness accounts for nearly half of the burden of disease and injury in Australia and costs the healthcare system well over $12 billion each year.

A recent report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that chronic diseases are associated with more days off work and/or with being out of the workforce altogether. While Australia is a healthy country by international standards, around 32 per cent of the nation’s illness is caused by tobacco, obesity, harmful and high use of alcohol, physical inactivity, poor diet and associated risk factors of high blood pressure and cholesterol. Facts like this underline the urgency and importance of taking preventative action to ensure a healthy future for all Australians.

It is widely accepted that the basics of our health system are strong, including the high-quality training of our hardworking and dedicated health professionals. But there are significant inequalities in our health system that leave fellow Australians in lower socioeconomic circumstances more susceptible to chronic disease, in particular Indigenous Australia.

Statistics prove that Indigenous Australians make up a population of individuals who are young and growing and who face different demographic challenges to other Australians. It is also a population facing unacceptable levels of disadvantage in living standards, education, health and employment. The difference in life expectancy is a shocking statistic. That is why I am proud that our government has committed $805 million over four years to the national partnership agreements on closing the gap in Indigenous health outcomes. Figures released today show that life expectancy differs by 11.5 years in men and 9.7 years in women.

The major investment aims to prevent and better manage chronic disease by tackling risk factors, improve management in our primary care, improve follow-up care and increase the capacity to deliver effective health care to Indigenous Australians. Part of this funding will be used to improve access to renal dialysis services for remote communities in the Northern Territory. The government are working closely with our NT colleagues to implement this initiative in a phased approach, and it is vitally important that we do, because in the Northern Territory Aboriginal people have an incidence of end stage renal disease 28 times higher than that
of non-Indigenous Australians. That is why I am proud to be part of a government that is prepared to take action on chronic disease.

Our government, particularly the Minister for Health and Ageing, is very serious about tackling childhood obesity. The fight against the obesity epidemic starts with our children, and the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden project is an innovative and practical way of getting children involved. This project tackles childhood obesity by giving children hands-on experience in healthy eating. It was both a pleasure and an honour to open a demonstration site at Alawa Primary School last year with the very hardworking Minister for Health and Ageing.

It was fantastic the other week when our minister announced that the Rudd government will invest a massive $85 million into health projects for the people of Darwin and the Northern Territory, health projects that will build on the Rudd government’s investment of $19 million for an oncology facility and $10 million for a GP superclinic at Palmerston, and I am happy to report both are progressing well. Because of the failures of the previous Liberal government to plan for the future of the health system and despite the major challenges of the budget caused by the global recession, health and ageing remain a top priority for our government. The Rudd government is investing in the whole health system across the whole country to deliver better health outcomes for Australians, no matter where they live. I commend this motion to the House.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (7.52 pm)—In speaking to what is a commendable motion, I think it would be incomplete if we did not mention some of the very important budgetary and fiscal measures upon which a functional health system relies. This debate would be incomplete if we were not to note the events of the last few months, in particular the global financial crisis. What I want to cover today in the brief time available is the current government’s policies on smoking and alcohol, some of the Indigenous health issues—end stage renal failure, to name one—and their most recent announcement to cut support for cataract surgery, the most cost-effective surgical intervention known to mankind.

Before I do that, I want to recognise some very good work done by my intern, Matt Haney, on closing the gap. He has done an extraordinary piece of work on the role of Indigenous community stores, which the member for Solomon will have a great interest in reading when it becomes available and tabled. That report looks very closely at the availability of fresh fruit, vegetables and foodstuffs, the supply chain issues and profitability of community stores. I congratulate Matt for his diligence and enthusiasm.

Now to the bad news. We have seen a global financial correction of hitherto unknown dimensions, and you have to go back generations to see something quite as large. But what we have seen in this country is what I would argue to be a completely disproportionate response that makes it virtually impossible to fund some of the noble measures that are mentioned in this motion. For us to be able to afford the future price of alcohol related disease, smoking, obesity and closing the gap we need some fiscal breathing space. That has been completely taken away in the budget of this year by this government and its reckless fiscal spending. To go $188 billion in debt, to talk about having to return our budget hopefully by the year 2020 to within 3.7 per cent of GDP debt or less, is to basically iron out and wipe out for a decade chances of fixing some of these desperate health issues and the noble notions that are contained within that.
The problem is when you are presented, as a government, with a 15 per cent cigarette tax increase and you refuse it, when you have an option to reform alcohol tax and you merely come up with an alcopops tax, or when you have an option to fix Indigenous health and you merely bargain with the Tangentyere Council about $50 million, saying: ‘They will not accept $50 million? Let’s make it $100 million.’ I mean, in that bargaining process around Alice Springs, you are effectively wiping out all of the savings that you are achieving from cataract surgery reform in one single measure. So what are you going to do? You as a government are going to make cataract surgery more expensive. We are going to see people who save up and pay for private cataract surgery because surgery in a public hospital, with a three-year waiting list, is utterly impossible. People will be denied cataract surgery. People will turn away from the most cost-effective intervention in medicine because they cannot pay the gap.

I concede that gaps may possibly come down as a result of a falling Medicare rebate, but not to the extent of $350. We know that there are 20,000 people who pay, who reach into their pocket every year and pay for that cataract operation they cannot get from a dysfunctional state government hospital system. Those people will pay more. People with private health cover will pay higher premiums as a result. They will pay greater gaps as the reduced rebate is simply forced onto people who are good enough, hardworking enough and committed enough to their own health to find some way to pay their premiums.

It is a very sorry notion that the most effective intervention is effectively having its support halved by this government’s reduction of those rebates to such an extent and with no real foresight as to the impact it could have on remote and rural cataract surgery delivery. Remote and rural cataract surgery delivery is not a profitable enterprise—this is not about bashing wealthy doctors. This is about making it harder to deliver these services in remote and rural areas, where they are quite expensive to deliver.

Worst of all, what we will see with that move is that people who, at the moment, are paying for this intervention may choose to delay the operation. What is the alternative to not having your cataracts done? Blindness—not a great alternative. The alternative to not having the operation done is falling over and fracturing your hip, resulting in charges to the health system and the public purse that we do not want to contemplate. But that has been done in a small measure, for short-termism and to try and find some easy costs with which to bag greedy medical specialists. It fits into that ideological attack on private health cover which we are starting to see more and more from this government.

I commend this motion, but I ask the House to note that the actions of this government are working completely contrary to the good recommendations that are contained here.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! The time allocated for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Iran: Baha’i Detainees

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Turnour:

That the House:

(1) notes with serious concern that:
(a) seven Baha’i community members in Iran have been charged with spying, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic Republic, and that these charges could attract the death penalty; and

(b) the Baha’i detainees have not been given any access to legal representation and have not been subject to due legal process;

(2) calls on Iran to respect rights to freedom of religion and the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and association, in accordance with international human rights conventions; and

(3) calls on Iran to release the seven Baha’i detainees without delay.

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (7.57 pm)—I rise tonight to support the seven Baha’i detainees in Iran. In Australia, we live in the lucky country. We enjoy freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of belief. We have a healthy democracy and we have legislation that protects those rights.

While we in Australia enjoy these freedoms, as do the citizens of many countries across the globe, those in Iran do not. Seven leading members of the Iranian Baha’i community have been detained since March and May 2008. They have been charged with spying for Israel, insulting religious sanctities and propagandising against the Islamic republic. More recently, I have been advised by the Australian Baha’i community that a new charge appears to have been levelled against the seven, that of spreading corruption on earth. I welcome the members of the Baha’i community here this evening and thank them for bringing these issues to the attention of both me and the parliament.

The Baha’i detainees have not been subject to due legal process. I understand that they have been waiting for over eight months to be notified of the charges and have been given no access to decent legal representation. The Australian government is concerned that these charges are part of a pattern of official discrimination against members of the Baha’i faith in Iran.

The Baha’i faith was founded over a century and half ago in Iran and has more than five million followers in more than 100,000 localities throughout the world. I am proud to say that we have got some of them in my electorate of Leichhardt. Earlier this year, I met with Dr Ramin Zadeh, a local resident of my electorate and a member of the spiritual assembly of the Baha’i in Cairns. He was very concerned about the charges facing the seven Baha’i leaders, which could potentially attract the death penalty, and I thank him for initially bringing it to my attention. He talked to me about the Baha’i faith, about the horrific treatment of many followers in Iran and about the case of the seven leaders currently detained.

For 30 years, Iranian Baha’is have faced religious persecution. Between 1978 and 1998, over 200 Baha’is were executed by Iranian authorities, and many more were imprisoned and tortured. Through the 1990s, persecutions predominantly took the form of blocking Baha’i social and economically—for example, not permitting Baha’i youth to attend university, not extending bank loans to Baha’is and vilification of Baha’is in the state-run news media.

More recently, a number of incidents indicate that there has been a resurgence of extreme religious persecution against the Baha’is, which is clearly disturbing. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is a United Nations treaty based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is considered by many to be one of the most important human rights treaties in the world. Iran has signed and ratified this document. Article 18 of the covenant states:
Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

As countries throughout the world use the covenant as a collective vision for how governments everywhere should treat their citizens, Iranian Baha’is are facing circumstances that undermine this and other human rights, even though Iran is supposed to have ratified this covenant.

There are seven Baha’i leaders presently imprisoned in Iran. They have been there for a year now. It took eight months before they were advised of their charges. They do not have access to legal representation. They have minimal contact with their loved ones. It has also been reported that people who have worked closely with the seven have had their homes raided and items confiscated and have been interrogated and even arrested. So Baha’is are being persecuted today in Iran. This motion brings that to the attention of the Committee and calls on the Iranian government to stop doing this.

I ask the Iranian authorities to release the seven Baha’i detainees and members of other religious minorities imprisoned for exercising their religious beliefs. The international community—the United Nations, numerous governments and parliaments, human rights groups and media outlets—have responded to the persecution of the Iranian Baha’i community. Today, I formally add my name to this list. The Australian government’s firm position is that the right to freedom of religion and the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and association must be respected in all countries in accordance with international human rights conventions.

We have already raised the issue of discrimination against the Baha’is at the United Nations, including in Australia’s statement to the eighth session of the Human Rights Council in 2008. We have co-sponsored a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran at the 63rd UN General Assembly in 2008. We will maintain close interest in this case and will continue to raise our concerns with the Iranian government. I have had a chance to speak to the foreign minister about this. I know that many other members would have liked to speak on this motion tonight—not enough of us could do so but I know that many others would have liked to. I commend this motion to the Committee.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (8.02 pm)—It is an honour to speak on this motion tonight as the member for Cowan and represent the Wanneroo Baha’i community within my electorate. On 25 February this year I spoke in the House regarding this very issue, the persecution of the practitioners of the Baha’i faith and other religious minorities by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On that occasion I spoke specifically about the Baha’is and the struggles they face in their homeland. In particular this matter is about the imprisonment of the seven main Baha’i leaders in Iran. Those leaders are Mrs Mahvash Sabet, Mrs Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr Jamaloddin Khanjani, Mr Afif Naemi, Mr Saeid Rezaie, Mr Behrouz Tavakkoli and Mr Vahid Tizfahm.

On 14 May, just a week ago, the seven Baha’i leaders in Iran had spent a full year in detention. I would like to be able to say that there has been some progress since I last spoke on this issue, but the cause of justice in Iran has only gone backwards in the last few months. It has recently been publicised that the Baha’i seven may face another charge, that of spreading corruption on earth, which is in addition to the other charges reportedly laid. It is my firm view
that all these charges have no validity and remain inconsistent with the teachings of the Baha’i faith.

I would now like to turn my attention to the latest charge of ‘spreading corruption in the world’. This was apparently the charge by which the Iranian government after the 1979 revolution executed many Baha’is. No doubt it is a thin veil for the intent to eliminate dissent in Iran. It is a trumped-up, catch-all excuse with a single purpose, and that is for an illegitimate and paranoid regime to maintain control over an increasingly sceptical general population. My point is that this charge has nothing to do with offences and everything to do with political control and religious persecution.

It would, however, be wrong of me not to speak of this charge in more detail. This charge goes to religious intolerance, and it is clear that in Iran tolerance seems to be a very rare value at this point. While I believe that such a charge is primarily about exerting political control, we cannot ignore the religious intolerance at the core. I am not Baha’i; I worship at the Church of Christ, and it is there through faith that I seek strength, support and guidance. I believe in Christianity. But that does not mean I consider any other faith corrupt.

What I do find reprehensible is that the Islamic leadership in Iran think themselves so high and significant that they can determine the followers of another faith to be spreaders of corruption. The whole world should be concerned about such a base fundamentalist belief. Any religion that finds justification in its holy books to authorise executions and exercise judgments that another faith is a corruption on the world should be of great concern to the followers of all faiths and religions. The Christian world has moved on in the last 800 years since the Crusades. Clearly, Islam in Iran has not moved on. What is happening in Iran to the Baha’is stands as a warning to all of us—nonbelievers in Islam are all called ‘infidels’, and that is not a term of respect, and we should be on guard. In Iran there are more than 300,000 followers of the Baha’i faith. It is worth noting that the persecution of the Baha’i has continually occurred over the 150 years since its origin. They have been a convenient scapegoat for the failures of the Iranian government and the Iranian economy.

In February I wrote to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to inform him of my view that the arrest of the seven leaders was wrong and that their treatment whilst in custody has been unfair, unreasonable and inhumane. I also asked for the charges to be dropped and, if that was not possible, that a fair and open trial be conducted in front of international media. As expected, I have not received a reply. But I can assure the Islamic Republic of Iran that I have no regard for their actions and will continue to be critical of them for as long as I am here or until fundamental reform takes place.

On 12 June the Iranian presidential elections will take place. I believe that the President seeks to shore up his position by blaming and persecuting the Baha’is as a political tactic. After the election, talks between the US and Iran are due to take place. I wait to see if the government’s attitude to the Baha’is then changes; I also wonder whether the seven Baha’i leaders will be used as political pawns and may be tried and executed as part of the President’s re-election campaign. This issue is about politics and persecution, and it is about the withdrawal of the right to freely practise religion. It is about religious intolerance and it is about the extreme practice of politics. The seven Baha’i leaders should have their charges dropped and they should be released immediately. The Iranian government should also restore the rights of
Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (8.07 pm)—I rise today to speak in support of this motion and I do so because it is such an important motion and because seven Iranian Baha’i leaders have been jailed in Iran for a year. Firstly, there were no formal charges for eight months. After eight months they were charged with trumped-up charges of espionage, insulting religious sanctities and propaganda against the Islamic republic. The detainees have not been given any access to legal representation and have not been subject to due legal process. They are facing charges that could attract the death penalty.

The Australian government is deeply concerned about the situation of the seven members—five men and two women—of the Baha’i community. The Australian government is concerned that these charges constitute official discrimination in Iran against members of the Baha’i faith. On 17 April the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Stephen Smith, conveyed the Australian government’s serious concerns directly to the Iranian foreign minister. Over the past year the Australian government has regularly raised its concerns about the seven Baha’i detainees with the Iranian authorities and will continue to do so. At the very least, Iran should ensure that any trial is fair, transparent and meets international standards.

The government has also raised the issue at relevant international meetings, including the June session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. Australia also co-sponsored a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran at the 63rd UN General Assembly in 2008, which expressed the international community’s strong concern about the current situation of the Baha’i’s in Iran.

Others who have spoken out this year in condemnation of the actions of the Iranian authorities against the Baha’i’s include the European Union and the governments of Great Britain and the United States, as well as many parliamentarians in Brazil, Canada and Germany. Australia is home to people from a diversity of countries and faiths, where mutual respect and tolerance are the tradition. The right of citizens to maintain their own religious and cultural beliefs, to freedom of religion and to the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and association must be respected in all countries in accordance with international human rights conventions. By refusing these people of the Baha’i faith access to a lawyer, the Iranian government has denied them the human rights to which they are entitled under international law.

The Baha’i faith was founded in Iran in 1844 and now has more than five million followers in 236 countries and territories. The Baha’i’s come from nearly every national ethnic background. The Baha’i faith has been present in Australia since 1920. I am very proud that they are represented in my electorate of Hindmarsh. And Laird Varzaly does a very good job in representing the Baha’i community in the electorate of Hindmarsh. The importance of peace and the responsibility of each of us to work towards its attainment and continuation is demonstrated more by the Baha’i community than by what some other communities have demonstrated over a millennium.

I support this motion. I call on Iran to respect the right to freedom of religion and the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and association in accordance with international human rights conventions. I call on the government of Iran to release the seven Baha’i detainees without a single minute of delay. I also call upon the government of Iran to allow, at the very least, for a fair and open trial that meets international standards of justice.
Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (8.12 pm)—This is an important motion which, above all else, deals with religious freedom and the prevention of persecution, particularly on religious grounds. From my own reading and also from representations made to me over time in my electorate, I have found people who practise the Baha’i faith to be people of peace and goodwill. I find it ridiculous to suggest that, in a place like Iran, they would want to be spies. One might further ask just what that spying would achieve. There has been another case in Iran recently involving a woman broadcaster. She was suddenly dragged into a secret court, found guilty of spying and incarcerated. When the international community protested as to the injustice of these arrangements, the woman was taken back to court and a plea bargain was arranged. The result was not an eight-year term of incarceration but a two-year suspended sentence. That is like a nothing.

Why do you attack people for spying when, in your eyes, their only fault is that they draw attention to an alternative faith? I have not had people come to me and criticise the Muslim faith, the Islamic faith, because they are Baha’i. The Baha’i just say, ‘Can we please have the freedom to act in accordance with our faith?’ To me, this is extremely important. Previously, when representations were made to me that were not as specific as those in this situation where a group of people are in detention on account of charges for which there has been no proper process, I found myself making representations to the then Iranian ambassador. He came to my office to assure me that the Iranian constitution guarantees religious freedom. Yet, after my being told that, I am now confronted with the circumstances that the member for Leichhardt has drawn to the attention of the chamber. This situation is wrong and, what is more, it is unsustainable in terms of any logical response.

You cannot be a spy unless you have someone to whom you pass the information. Would that be because the economy of Iran is in dreadful shape, it has huge inflation and most people find it extremely difficult to survive on the income available to them? That is public knowledge. So why is it a sin if somebody has commented on that? As I said, when people have visited me they have come not to tell me what is wrong with Islam but to seek protection for their faith under international law.

I think we can welcome with considerable commitment this particular motion. The Iranian government is wrong because it alleges the activity of people but there is no attempt to prove it. That makes the following point to me: why would someone involved in a dominant religion have to be so brutal towards others who have a different point of view? If you are right, if you know that you are right and if you believe that you are right, why do you worry about the other fellow? It is just silly, and yet we have this ridiculous situation, frequently tolerated by Western countries. The attitude is: ‘Don’t you say that about them. Don’t you publish a cartoon.’ It would be pretty tough if we politicians had to worry about cartoons, wouldn’t it? Suppose we said: ‘You published a bad cartoon. I’m going to shoot you.’ In my mind, it is a religion under attack when Islamists have to use brute force to sustain their religion. It has happened in Christianity historically. SBS has just run a series on the Catholic religion—

(Time expired)

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (8.17 pm)—I rise today to support the motion urging Iran to respect the human rights of its Baha’i community. I acknowledge the members of the Baha’i community in the gallery today, who are part of the Australian Baha’i community, which has flourished here since 1920. The world watches with increasing apprehension the deterioration
of religious freedom in Iran. The religious fanaticism of the Iranian regime has led to the execution of untold numbers of journalists, writers, trade unionists, gays and lesbians and other minority groups. Not least among these are the Baha’i, whose progressive traditions, such as the equality of women, do not sit well with authoritarian theocracy.

The Baha’i emphasise the spiritual unity of all humankind and speak the common language of human rights. In modern Iran, to be a member of the Baha’i faith or any other minority is to live with the fear of state sanctioned abuse hanging over your family and your community. The arrest of the seven Baha’i leaders in May 2008, which this motion refers to with serious concern, is just one example of this. The lawyer for the seven Baha’i leaders, Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi, has been refused access to their case files and has been personally intimidated since taking on their case. These arrests are only one matter in a long catalogue of oppression and mistreatment stretching back many years. In 1980, all nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Baha’i in Iran were abducted and are presumed dead. In 1983, 10 Baha’i women were hanged for the innocuous act of teaching religious classes to Baha’i youth. The youngest teacher, Mona Mahmudizhad, was 17 years old.

The ugly character of the current Iranian regime has been greeted with horror by many Iranians overseas. A petition by over 500 actors, writers, journalists and artists and other Iranian expatriates living around the world has apologised to the Baha’i community, expressing their dismay that the once great nation of Iran has deteriorated to this.

All the evidence suggests that the repression of the Baha’i emanates from the highest Iranian authorities. In 1991, an ominous memorandum on the ‘Baha’i question’ issued by the office of Ayatollah Khomeini detailed a systematic effort to expunge all trace of the Baha’i people from the cultural fabric of Iran. Children who identified themselves as Baha’i were not allowed to be enrolled in schools; all Baha’i were to be expelled from universities. This memorandum on the Baha’i, issued by the office of Ayatollah Khomeini, also included the following statement:

A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside Iran.

In 2005 another letter from the Chairman of the Command Headquarters of the Armed Forces in Iran was sent to a number of governmental agencies, including the Revolutionary Guard, the armed forces and the police, ordering those agencies to identify adherents of the Baha’i faith and ‘monitor’ their activities. This is the sort of behaviour we have seen from totalitarian regimes before, and we must recognise it for what it is. The classification of minorities in this way has been the awful precursor to ethnic and cultural cleansing in the past across the world. Dehumanising any group of people and denying them rights because of their beliefs or race or religion has all too often been the first step towards physical attacks on or the murder of people in that group.

Amid this ongoing oppression, the 350,000-strong Baha’i community in Iran survives. In the face of dawn raids on their homes, the desecration of their cemeteries with bulldozers, the vilification of Baha’i children in their classrooms, the disbarring of Baha’i from designated professions and threats against Muslims who associate with Baha’i, the community has shown substantial bravery. There is no doubt that the treatment of the Baha’i community is impermissible and unacceptable by all known standards of human rights. I should mention, too, that three of the seven Baha’i leaders arrested recently have close relatives in Australia. I extend my support to all the detained Baha’i leaders and their families. (Time expired)
Mr SULLIVAN (Longman) (8.22 pm)—As you will be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker Vale, I was not scheduled to speak in this debate, but I heard a few moments ago that there was a vacancy, so I am very pleased to be able to take this opportunity to support the motion put forward by my colleague the member for Leichhardt in respect of the circumstances that the Baha’i community find themselves in in Iran at the moment. I must apologise to Erica Cole, the secretary of the local spiritual assembly at home in Longman, as I had indicated to her that I was not going to have an opportunity to speak, so perhaps she will not be glued to the radio or the television to hear the contribution I am about to make. I welcome the members of the Baha’i community who are here today to listen to us support them in what are very troubling times for them. As my colleague has just said, a number of the people in prison, particularly the seven Baha’i that we are concerned about, have relations in Australia. It is important that we as Australians support our fellow Australians of the Baha’i faith.

These folk have been imprisoned for 12 months, essentially without charge. There have been charges levelled but no charges made—a circumstance that we just would not tolerate in our own country. I am not particularly interested in trying to force our standards onto the entire world, but in any part of the civilised world this would be intolerable. I think we have in Iran a country on the cusp, a country that ought to be doing more to look after its community, because it does want to be, I understand, a player in the world situation. Essentially what it is doing is marginalising itself as a country. We have seen other countries come from this situation in the past by recognising the error of their ways. I would hope that the error of Iran’s way in relation to the treatment of the Baha’i’s, not just in 2008 but for many years previously, is something that it will change.

I had the privilege—and it was a privilege—to act on behalf of a Baha’i member of my community, a fellow whose first name is Hamid, which is not an unusual first name for somebody from Iran. He is, I can stand here and say, one of the most delightful men I have met in my life. He was facing a grave injustice; he still faces it, but he faces it with great stoicism. I guess that is part of what he has learnt as a Baha’i person who escaped from Iran and came to our country via New Zealand as a refugee.

As has been said, the Baha’i people are a wonderful, brave, peace-loving people. They do not deserve anybody to find fault. That somebody does and that somebody does it repeatedly, serially and incessantly, with great unfairness in the penalties that are imposed, is something we need to stand up and talk about. The fact that so many beyond the seven who are the focus of the current campaign are currently in prison or have been in prison over recent years is something we should regret a great deal. The international Baha’i community is right to bring this campaign to us, as members of this chamber. We are right, as was the British Prime Minister, in saying to Iran that they must bring forward charges and they must give the imprisoned people the opportunity to answer those charges which, as we know, are best described as ‘trumped up’. The purpose for them is hard to see other than as a form of genocide. A religious cleansing of Iran could be the only context we could be looking at. As I think the member from the opposition mentioned earlier, who are they spying for? What are they going to tell them? (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DS Vale)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.
Debate resumed from 16 March.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DS Vale)—The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Roads

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (8.27 pm)—I would like to begin with a little history which, as will become evident and as is so often the case, has great bearing on events today. In 1955, the noted town planner and architect Gordon Stephenson produced a scheme for the future development of the Perth metropolitan area, a work commissioned by the state government of the day. That plan laid the framework for the vastly expanded city we see today and included a key ring road, the likes of which have been so successful in many other major urban centres.

Work on what would be called the Roe Highway—named after WA’s first surveyor-general, John Septimus Roe—began in 1981 and the first stage was opened in 1983. The Roe Highway project, which would form the southern link of the ring road and crucially connect industrial centres and long-distance transport operations in the east with the Port of Fremantle in the west, had begun. Progress continued, with stage 2 completed in 1984 and stage 3 in 1988, but then it slowed. In 2001, stage 4 was finished, followed by stages 5, 6 and 7, with the latter completed in 2006. And there the history lesson ends, with the project grinding to a halt under a state Labor government which put the electoral interests of a local member ahead of what was best for the community—a clear example of corruption of the democratic process.

That government had been happy to support the project as it barrelled around Liberal seats—which, incidentally, supported the entire project—but the eastern boundary of the state electorate of Fremantle proved insurmountable, even for a massive four-lane road of freeway standard. ‘Stage 8 is unnecessary,’ the state counterparts of members opposite said and still say today. ‘It is bad for the environment and it is bad for the birds,’ they said and still say today, with some even going so far as to claim—and you could not make up better quotes than this—that birds are more important than people. The state Labor leader, Eric Ripper, the man who would be Premier if he could find enough like-minded souls to vote for him, said:

The preservation of the area’s flora and fauna must take precedence over the unnecessary extension of the highway.

He said stage 8 would cut through:

… the habitats of endangered species such as the Carnaby’s Black Cockatoo and Peregrine Falcon as well as migratory birds including the Great White Egret and the Rainbow Bee Eater.

He neglected to mention that, in scrapping this project, his party had consigned hundreds of thousands of people to live in habitats which endangered humans through pollution and dangerous road conditions largely caused by heavy goods vehicles which had been intended to use the completed Roe Highway. Of course, the real reason was preserving votes in the supposed safe Labor seat of Fremantle, which, ironically, was lost to the Greens only two weeks ago. Concern was not so much for endangered birds as for endangered political careers—and so the Roe Highway stalled, just eight kilometres short of the target envisioned more than 50 years earlier.

The coalition federal government of the day was even willing to put more funds into the project to see it through to completion, because we believe that people are important. We treat
the environment with the greatest of respect too, but we understand that sometimes there must be compromises to achieve the best possible outcome. The state government could not be forced to complete the project, but the federal government was able to order that land for the project continue to be reserved. Unfortunately, it was unable to preserve land which had been set aside for the Fremantle Eastern Bypass linking stage 8 into the port, and the state government hurriedly sold that property. Development of that three-kilometre strip has made it impractical to pursue the planned bypass.

The handling of this entire affair was inept, to say the least. But with the election of a state coalition government there is renewed hope that the project will be completed. That government has committed more than $180 million to the project over the next four years and entered into negotiations with the federal government in a spirit of cooperation, hoping to see Commonwealth funding restored. The indications from these talks are positive, I understand, and I urge the federal government to endorse this project. However, there is a fly in the ointment—or, rather, there is an environment minister in the ointment. This is the environment minister who seems hell bent on winning a reputation for obstructing development whatever the cost. His dithering over approval for a multi-billion-dollar gas project for the north-west of WA ultimately saw that deal go to the Northern Territory. Now a handful of vocal Roe Highway opponents appear to have the minister’s ear, and he is said to be considering the plan.

I have a simple question for the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts—indeed, for the federal government—and that is: what is most important? Is it a major road project which delivers immeasurable health and safety benefits while boosting the economy not only through the construction phase but through the provision of faster, more efficient transportation for the decades ahead? Or is it the supposed preservation of a strip of bush which is already suffering from the effects of pollution and could in effect be preserved in tandem with construction of the road? Polls on the project have demonstrated widespread support for it across a broad range of suburbs, with opponents, not surprisingly, concentrated in the area which would be closest to the highway. Presumably, the flora and fauna were unscathed by the development of their homes. At present, the vast majority of east-west traffic across southern Perth transits either Leach Highway or South Street, with motorists increasingly choosing the latter because the former is so overwhelmed by heavy goods trucks.

Trucks do not use the abbreviated Roe Highway as planned, but at the end of stage 7 they are forced to switch to Leach Highway. The result is that Leach Highway and South Street are often jammed and cars are routinely forced into uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous proximity with huge trucks. Accidents are taking place on these overcrowded roads. Only last week a young boy was hit while crossing South Street on his way to Leeming Senior High School—which is not only in my electorate but is also in the same suburb as my home. It is one of dozens of such accidents to have taken place in recent years.

Some suburbs which face Leach Highway have seen unsightly noise barriers rise in front of their homes in a bid to shield them from the constant shaking and roaring of trucks. Of course, the barriers do nothing to protect residents from the diesel clouds which billow down these roads. At the same time, transport operators are forced to endure congested stop-start traffic, raising their operating costs and significantly reducing efficiency. With many transport opera-
tors already existing on the thinnest of margins amid a tightening economic climate, this is a burden they really cannot afford to carry.

The extension of Roe Highway is good for residents, it is good for motorists and it is good for business. No case has been made to suggest the environmental impact of the project would be so detrimental as to negate the great benefits it would deliver society. The environmental extremists paint those supporting such projects as the enemies of nature. The truth is that fostering the development and progress of our species is as natural as it gets. Of course we all want to be in a clean, green environment and we do our best to achieve that. Completion of the Roe Highway project will go a long way to delivering a better environment for many Perth people and will adversely affect a few, along with possibly a small slice of land. There can be little doubt which side deserves to win out.

Ms Sylvia Whilesmith

Mr John Armitage

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (8.37 pm)—I wanted to put into the Hansard record a eulogy I recently gave. I said:

We are met here at St Bernadette’s Lalor Park, family and friends, to welcome back Sylvia Amy Whilesmith, to celebrate her life and bid her our last farewells.

I note that we have here Richard Amery MP, Amanda Fazio MLC—

and Deputy President of the Legislative Council—

former member Bob Christie, former MLC Dorothy Isaksen and Assistant General Secretary Rob Allan amongst many others.

There were three pillars in Sylvia’s life, her family, her religion, and the labor movement. The latter may also qualify as a religion, but I wouldn’t make that point here. Stephen reminds me about her love of Souths footy team.

Born in Mascot, it was here in Lalor Park that together with the love of her life her late husband Vic and her young family that Sylvia settled. And it’s here in Lalor Park that Sylvia put down the strongest and deepest roots.

To make ends meet Sylvia found work in the hospitality industry and quickly became involved in the Union. Sylvia was involved at all levels and became an organiser with the union. She attended the State Conference of the Labor Party for more than 20 years as a delegate for the Union. She was a fixture there.

At a time when women played a lesser role in the Labor Party Sylvia was front rank occupying most positions at branch, State and Federal Electorate Councils.

Sylvia joined Mascot branch in 1946 and when her family moved joined Seven Hills Branch and then Lalor Park Branch.

Sylvia was the campaign director for the Seven Hills State seat for Bob Christie. Sylvia was just a born organiser. If there was a fundraising function, a Chifley Ball, a pre poll booth or postal votes or polling booth rosters to be organised Sylvia would be in the thick of it for Federal, State and Council campaigns. Today we would say that she had abundant leadership qualities which she regularly exercised.

Sylvia was someone who was on first name terms with some of the most powerful Labor politicians in this State and she was never backward in pointing out any of their perceived shortcomings. But Sylvia just treated everyone the same, Premiers, Ministers, General Secretaries and just ordinary folk, just the same.
Sylvia was a trail blazer when she ran with Leo Kelly for Blacktown City Council Ward 2 in 1983 and became Labor’s first elected woman Councillor on Blacktown City Council and again in 1986 when she became Labor’s first woman Deputy Mayor on Blacktown City Council.

This was all before affirmative action and weighted votes for women candidates that we now have. Of course today we would think it odd if we didn’t have Labor women Councillors on Blacktown Council but before Sylvia we had none.

Sylvia was a rough diamond that sparkled brightly. If you met Sylvia you wouldn’t forget her, she had that kind of personality.

Sylvia was a fighter who never took a backwards step. To be befriended by Sylvia, was to have the loyalest of loyal friends. But if you didn’t have an argument with Sylvia you didn’t know her and you weren’t her friend.

But beneath that sometimes gruff exterior beat a soft and compassionate heart. One that never forgot those who were struggling or what it was like to struggle to make ends meet or who the Labor Party should be working for and helping.

A particularly generous gift of Sylvia was to inspire and encourage younger members of the Party and I was a recipient of that. I owe a lot to her for her support. I know that I am not on my own.

Sylvia was immensely proud of her children Steven, Sharon, Noelene, Annette, Phillip and Michael, their partners and her grandchildren and great grand children.

To Sylvia’s family we thank you for her life of service dedicated to helping others, making life a little bit easier for others. We thank them for 63 years service to the Labor Party for which she was honoured with life membership.

May Sylvia’s life continue to inspire others; she was; she is a legend in the Labor Party.

Saint Peter take care, Sylvia’s coming. She’ll organise those angels with her beloved Vic once more by her side.

Sylvia Whilesmith rest in peace.

I also want to say a few remarks on the passing of John Armitage, the first member for Chifley. John was elected in 1961 for the seat of Mitchell and held it until the election in 1963. He was again elected as the federal member for Chifley in 1969 until his retirement in 1983.

At his FEC John had Tony Johnson, Bob Christie, Richard Amery and John Aquilina, who all went on to become state members of parliament—two are still there—and, of course, Russ Gorman and me. All of us would acknowledge that we were influenced by him. He lived at Normanhurst and when Chifley was created moved to Sevenhills. He was, by profession, a banker. He started off with the Commonwealth Bank and then worked for the Reserve Bank. In the break between parliaments from 1965 to 1969 he was Assistant General Secretary of the party. One might say that he was a little unlucky not to have risen to the rank of being a minister. In those days I remember the old seat of Mitchell that included Blacktown—but Madam Deputy Speaker, you would know—as far up the mountains as East Kurrajong, taking in what we would say was a lot of tiger country. So it was a difficult seat, and when Mitchell was split into Mitchell and Chifley he was able to win Chifley. I would like to read the last paragraph of his first speech in 1969:

Finally, I once again make an appeal to this Parliament to have a look at the situation of those underprivileged sections of our community, small in number, who have such very great problems; those underprivileged sections of the community which do not have the influence because they do not have the voting power but whose problems nevertheless are far greater than those of most of the rest of the peo-
ple living in this very affluent society. Until these things are looked at the conscience of this country and the conscience of this Parliament cannot be satisfied.

He represented Chifley when there were huge new housing commission areas, at both Leila Park and Mount Druitt—Leila Park was already there but Mount Druitt took place. If we ask, ‘Well, what did he achieve?’ I particular remember the polyclinic which was constructed in the Whitlam years. It provided, essentially, an emergency service, plus some other specialist services, in lieu of having a hospital there. So it met a very real need for a lot of people who were really struggling.

Throughout their development the Mount Druitt suburbs were, of course, lacking in a lot of facilities, but in each suburb you will find a community hall which was funded by the federal government but run by the council. After his retirement, a childcare centre in Mount Druitt was named in his honour—the John Armitage Child Care Centre. His nickname, of course, was ‘The Bomber’. To my understanding he acquired the nickname because he was very much opposed to the building of a second airport in Sydney—at that time not in Badgerys Creek but north of it. He had the habit of recording aircraft noise at Mascot and then playing the noise back at rallies; hence the nickname ‘The Bomber’.

We could not do it today, of course, but he loved smoking a pipe, and I can remember many branch meetings where, with pipe in one hand and foot on a stool, he would give a report that could in no way ever be described as short. But he did make an immense contribution to the people of my electorate. On behalf of all those people, I would like to particularly pay a tribute to his beloved wife, Betty, to his children, Chris, Will and Margot, and to his grandchildren, and thank them for the real contribution that John made in his nearly 16 years of service to the people of my electorate. We will always remember him and his contribution very fondly.

Energy Efficiency
Green Energy

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (8.46 pm)—I rise tonight to speak on two grievances. The first grievance I share with many in Australia who have seen through the wheel spins and the word spinning of the Rudd government to recognise that Labor’s sustainability agenda is all announcements and no action. Australians with an interest in improving the sustainability of our economy and our lifestyle will be left scratching their heads after the Rudd government once again rebadged existing programs and moved money around as a poor substitute for real action and progress.

The Rudd budget axed or wound back more than 10 sustainability programs, some of which had not survived a year or progressed beyond the spin of a political announcement, only to replace them with a new set of headline-seeking announcements with no action in sight. Many of the axed programs dealing with improving the energy efficiency of our buildings, homes, workplaces and appliances have seen incentives for action replaced, delayed or substituted for yet-to-be announced regulatory requirements that have not been finalised or agreed.

The Rudd government simply repackaged commitments announced in the Council of Australian Governments’ communique from a fortnight earlier, when dealing with building requirements, appliance standards, rating tools, labelling and energy efficiency, and claimed
them as a new $62 million National Strategy on Energy Efficiency. Most elements of the Rudd government’s National Strategy on Energy Efficiency are conditional on yet-to-be-commenced regulatory impact analysis processes and still require agreement between all state and territory governments, which have traditionally each wanted to go their own way. It could be well beyond next year’s budget before any clear progress is made and the building construction and management industry and builders, occupiers and consumers have any clarity about the new prescriptive demands the Rudd government wants to impose on them.

The National Strategy on Energy Efficiency is not to be confused with The National Energy Efficiency Initiative, which is being spun by the Rudd government as ‘smart grids’ for the nation. The budget detail, however, reveals that this ‘$100 million program for an integrated system of renewable energy’ is for just one regional city of at least 25,000 people. While the Rudd government might claim to tick the box on smart grids, no thresholds, requirements or prerequisites for town selection were detailed in the budget. Let us hope that the process for selecting the regional centre or town to receive the National Energy Efficiency Initiative funding is more open and transparent than the way in which the Rudd government moved away from an open, transparent and evidence based Infrastructure Australia process to select some of the infrastructure projects proclaimed in the recent budget.

The Rudd government, without explanation or justification, overlooked and varied projects recommended by Infrastructure Australia, reannounced old projects and, in some cases, substituted its own as part of a road, rail and urban transit budget package that is scaled down from the former Howard government’s ambitious Auslink 2 agenda. This government seems to be focused on rebadging, redirecting or rolling over old programs as new announcements in the hope that people will happily accept their media spin and these announcements as substitutes for real sustainability action and substance.

Labor again missed another opportunity in the budget to make a real and meaningful advance in addressing energy efficiency in Australia’s existing building stock. While Australians will pay for Labor’s reckless spending spree over the past 18 months, we have not seen any tangible action to provide incentives and encouragement to deal with energy or environmental sustainability improvements in the existing built environment that already the advantage of having embedded construction emissions already in place. There is no obstacle to the Rudd government embracing the coalition’s green building depreciation initiative as a cost-effective sustainability measure and a practical stimulus step, and yet the Rudd government has passed up the opportunity.

The measure announced by the opposition leader, Malcolm Turnbull, will introduce accelerated depreciation rates for green building capital spending by doubling the depreciation for energy efficient, sustainable building measures. Instead, the Rudd government has chosen to direct building owners, managers, occupiers and the construction industry professionals on what they should be doing, without providing encouragement for sustainability improvements that are most cost-effective for individual buildings and their particular uses. This is another example of Labor’s short-sighted and confused approach to securing real and meaningful improvements in the sustainability of the built environment, and again it was illustrated by the changing, rebadging and lack of decisive action in the recent budget.

We did look, though, to see what is happening in a tangible sense, and I draw the parliament’s attention to the 30 May 2007 policy commitment by the then Rudd Labor opposition.
It said, to great acclaim: ‘A Rudd Labor government to tackle climate change by example’. When we look for the example what do we find? The then opposition leader, the now Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, announced in his words ‘a new bold, wide-ranging initiative to reduce energy and water use by the Commonwealth government’. The statement went on to say:

A Labor government will lead by example using its enormous purchasing power to drive markets for cleaner and greener goods and services helping to bring down prices for all Australians.

Amongst other things, one of those commitments was to ‘set an objective to power Parliament House and all MP electorate offices with renewable and clean energy’. Given that commitment, you could see why it would be an appropriate question to ask in Senate estimates. What has happened to the Rudd government with its election commitment to green power Parliament House? After 18 months in government Parliament House is yet to benefit from Mr Rudd’s election commitment that a Labor government would lead by example and ‘set an objective to power Parliament House and all MP electorate offices with renewable and clean energy’.

When asked about the lack of progress that the Prime Minister and the Rudd Labor government have made to power Parliament House with green energy, Mr Alan Thompson, a man I admire and have known for many years, who is the secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services, was forced into telling the Senate estimates hearing the unmentionable truth. He said:

I think there has been a brief discussion with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet about green energy but, as we explained to them, there is a significant budget cost. Once we explained that I think they decided to leave us to join up with the whole of government contract, and that is what we have done.

Clearly, this election promise made by then opposition leader, now Prime Minister Rudd, was not costed. It was an idea that was dreamed up, and no analysis was made into its achievability and what it might actually cost. Eighteen months on there is no real evidence that any progress has been made in achieving that goal. What we see in the answer to the question from Senate estimates is that the Department of Parliamentary Services is trying to buy some percentage, a modest percentage, of the Parliament House energy needs as green power. This is a long way off having this magnificent building powered in the way in which the Prime Minister convinced the Australian public it would be if he were elected.

I feel sorry for Mr Thompson—a man, as I have said, whom I admire—having to explain this, pointing out that he was trying to get a good price for electricity for the building. He went on to talk about the cost of green energy, and then Senator Bernardi asked:

So they have broken their promise for cost savings?

Mr Thompson said:

It is not my business to comment on that basis.

You can understand why it was a difficult question to be asked. It was a hospital pass from Prime Minister Rudd to the departmental bureaucrats, to the parliamentary officers, to explain his inaction and another example of how, when it comes to sustainability, they are all announcement and no action. The conversation went on to consider the question further. Senator Ryan, to his credit, asked:
And you were not told to seek 100 per cent renewable or green energy in that discussion?

Mr Thompson was then forced to account for his memory that there was not the money to achieve that goal. So, a far less significant proportion of energy is being pursued as green energy to power this building.

This is yet another example of how Australians are being told something by the Prime Minister, who knows more than anybody else what they should be doing, but when it comes to demonstrating, to setting an example through practical action, this Prime Minister and this Labor government fall short. They fall short over and over again. Nowhere is this clearer than in the sustainability goals that we should all share for our nation; nowhere is this clearer than in the sustainability programs that the Prime Minister claims he has in place but which, as I have said, are all announcement and no action.

In the minute that is available to me I will touch on one other point. Constituents in my electorate have said they welcome the previous government’s work on do not call registers and do not fax lists and the like. With some of the internet antispamming technologies, they feel they can manage the traffic coming onto their computers. I have been asked to pose the question: is it time for a ‘do not knock’ register? We have had in my electorate in some cases very persistent salespeople repeatedly returning to the same house offering wonderful deals on electricity, and I do not know how many times people have had to say they are not interested. They keep getting those visits. There have been others offering a pathway to salvation, and their persistence is admirable. People in my constituency recognise the common-law right for anyone to approach their front door; what they would like to know is whether there is some opportunity to say, ‘No, thank you. Do not knock unless you have been invited to attend the premises.’ (Time expired)

Western Sydney Transport

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.57 pm)—I cannot agree with everything that the member for Dunkley has said, but I do support his proposal for a ‘do not knock’ register.

As governments at federal, state and local levels consider plans to spend billions of dollars on projects to improve our nation’s infrastructure, it is not surprising that transport needs are at the top of the list. In New South Wales over the past few months we have seen almost daily proposals for motorway extensions, metro rail systems, tramways and other multibillion-dollar dreams. Apparently few of these have been well costed, and many could only be described as pipe dreams.

The recent experience of the Cross-City Tunnel and the Lane Cove Tunnel have not dented enthusiasm for even more inner-city projects designed to bring more and more commuters into the Sydney central business district. Yet even more proposals emerge from the short-sighted planners who seem to think that Sydney’s western boundary is somewhere east of Strathfield.

In this great grab for infrastructure dollars, there is one massive oversight. Sitting like an elephant in the lounge room is the 1,700-hectare government owned Badgerys Creek airport site in Western Sydney, in my electorate of Fowler. If there is any one piece of infrastructure that Sydney must plan for right now, it is a second airport to serve the Sydney region. As it happens, the next review of Sydney’s airport needs is scheduled for this year—it is 2009 already, the year that we are supposed to get the review which was deferred from 2005 to 2007
and then 2009. That review, however, is now to be part of the government’s white paper on Australia’s aviation future. While that review includes all aspects of aviation, the most awaited part of the white paper will be the question of a second Sydney airport.

The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government has taken a strong stand in the past on the issue of a second Sydney airport. In 2003, as an opposition frontbencher, he set out his position in a speech to the ALP St Peters Tempe branch in his electorate of Grayndler and later published the speech on his website. The now minister told the branch that the opposition, sparked by the construction of a third runway at Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, led to opposition growing in Western Sydney, which is in my electorate, to an airport at Badgerys Creek. He said:

This furore led to increasing concern in Western Sydney about the impact Badgerys Creek would have on people’s quality of life. I respect the position of other Labor MPs who are reflecting the views of some of their constituents, however I believe that Badgerys Creek remains the most viable option. The land at Badgerys Creek has been purchased and approved by two Environmental Impact Studies. The site is also twice the size of KSA—Kingsford Smith airport. He added:

Furthermore, the construction of an airport at Badgerys Creek would create somewhere between 30,000-60,000 new jobs and improved infrastructure in Western Sydney.

However, Labor must bring communities with us and we must respect local communities’ right to have primary say over the region in which they live.

The controversy surrounding a second airport for Sydney is about much more than parochial interests. A report conducted by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research found that between $9.2 and $11.2 billion would be lost to the economy if a second Sydney airport were not built. That’s why this is a debate about nation building, jobs and future economic opportunities—it is about having a long-term vision for this nation.

The minister went on to say:

At the end of the day, the planes have to go somewhere. Unless a second airport is built, pressure to move jets and regional airlines to Bankstown will inevitably grow. This outcome would be the ultimate disaster for Sydney.

Consensus can be achieved to abandon the Badgerys Creek option in our Platform if an alternative site is named.

Now we stand at a point where we can expect to see within the next few weeks the white paper for Australia’s aviation future. The review was announced by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government in April last year and the white paper is due by the middle of this year. It almost goes without saying that a major white paper on Australia’s aviation future must address the question of a second Sydney airport. If the minister is to be taken at his word, given in his speech to his ALP branch, then the white paper will begin another search for the site of Sydney’s second airport. But I doubt that, despite the best efforts to bring community in with the government in the selection process, any site considered will enjoy the full support of the local community.

In the meantime we are left with that elephant in the room—the Badgerys Creek airport site of more than 1,700 hectares of land in Commonwealth ownership—without the slightest idea of what to do with it. Beyond that are the areas beneath the range of flight paths set out when an airport was planned for the site. The effect of this has been to sterilise thousands of hec-
tares of valuable land on Sydney’s western fringe. On previous occasions in this House I have detailed the impact of the restrictions imposed by the airport designation on families and businesses in the area surrounding the redundant airport site. Some of these impacts would make a good script for a *Yes, Minister* episode. For example, homeowners cannot build an extension to their home unless they have noise insulation because it is under the flight path of a non-existent airport, an airport that this government has said it will never ever build. For many residents it has already meant putting their lives on hold. In fact, they have had their lives on hold for 25 years. Until the airport designation is lifted they cannot plan for their future. But to these reasons for deciding the future of the Badgerys Creek site we can add the important impact on transport planning for Western Sydney and other planning issues.

I recently saw an outline of a transport plan prepared by Dr Garry Glazebrook of the University of Technology, Sydney. Glazebrook’s $40 billion plan to develop public transport in Sydney contains most of the usual wish list items. The plan envisages a network of metro rail, light rail, bus routes and T-ways as well as extensions to heavy rail. As I said earlier in this speech, there is a concentration of new transport links east of Strathfield. But one thing really struck me about the plan—apart from the words ‘Badgerys Creek’ in a vacant part of the map there is no mention of a second Sydney airport. The planned heavy rail extension from Glenfield to Leppington terminates halfway to Badgerys Creek—no airport site so no transport links.

As anyone from Western Sydney who has relied on the M5 tollway to catch a morning flight from Kingsford Smith knows only too well, it is a good idea to allow an extra hour for the journey. From the centre of Fowler the trip can take less than half-an-hour but you would not consider trying to make a flight in peak hour in less than 1½ hours. I am sure the same would apply to approaching the airport from other directions. Yet here we have transport planning experts presenting solutions to Sydney’s transport problems without knowing the location of Sydney’s second airport. As the minister said:

… this is a debate about nation building, jobs and future economic opportunities—it is about having a long-term vision for this nation.

So at a time when we are engaged in the biggest nation-building program in Australia’s history surely we should have some long-term vision. Without this vision it is impossible to plan for transport links to a second Sydney airport and sadly for Western Sydney it is impossible to plan for the future of the single biggest reserve of land in the Sydney basin. The minister began his speech to the branch back in 2003 by saying:

The previous Labor Government made a dreadful decision when it decided to build a third runway at Kingsford Smith Airport …

Failing to make a decision at the earliest possible time on the location of a second Sydney airport will only compound that dreadful decision. Following the release of the white paper, the minister should definitely act and he should act immediately to lift the airport designation at Badgerys Creek for the sake of the people that I proudly represent in Fowler. *(Time expired)*

Queensland and New South Wales Floods

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (9.07 pm)—I rise to speak about events on the mid-North Coast and North Coast of New South Wales over the past weekend—the floods, high winds and significant coastal damage that has occurred. This is the third flood and wind incident this year and it is starting to really test the resilience and the mettle of the communities of the mid-
North Coast and North Coast. There are four MPs of all different political persuasions affected by this—the members for Richmond, Page and Cowper and I have all got various stories and various communities who have been significantly impacted by the events of the last 48 hours. This is the third event in a period of about three months. It is really starting to test the community in general.

I am certainly appreciative of the comments that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition made this afternoon during question time regarding the thoughts and respect of both sides of the parliament for the communities of the mid-North Coast and North Coast. I am also appreciative of the assistance package put forward by the Prime Minister and the government. I certainly encourage all members who are eligible or who think they may be eligible for the assistance package—$1,000 for adults and $400 per child as a lump sum payment, with the ability to apply for that over the next six months—to ask the question through Centrelink or through the four mid-North Coast and North Coast members’ offices to make sure that payment does get through. As well, I understand there are payments with regard to property loss and stock loss. I am certain the doors of the four MPs in this region and of Centrelink are open to anyone who wants to test the question with regard to property and stock loss within the region. The damage is significant—it is a natural disaster relief region right down the coast to the Port Macquarie-Hasting Council. Unfortunately, two lives have been lost and certainly the thoughts of the whole community are with the families affected.

Private property loss is unknown at this point as we are still in the recovery stage, but it is expected to be expensive and certainly in the millions of dollars in losses of crops, stocks and basic capital on the various properties affected in the region. As well, the public property losses are significant. The road network is in trouble on the North Coast and the mid-North Coast with the amount of movement of ground due to the heavy soils and the amount of rain over the three-month period. We are still sorting out landslips from the last flood. To have this on top is creating a great deal of difficulty for a lot of people, so much so that with the number of bridges broken last weekend there is the expectation that a lot of people will be isolated for many months to come because of the fracture of the road network over the last 48 hours. This needs to be remembered by all in public policy.

The management of road networks on the mid-North Coast and North Coast of New South Wales is largely being left to local authorities, who do not have the resources. One council has just done a report that included information about a backlog of about $120 million for local road and bridge maintenance that it has been left with. All these councils are in high-growth areas. They are rate-pegged at a state level and, when disaster situations such as the flood and wind of the last 48 hours come along, any attempt by the local authorities to provide that road network is destroyed. It really is an obligation on all of us, at all levels of government, to provide for communities such as the mid-North and North Coast of New South Wales.

It is not only the road network. Travelling around last weekend, I saw damage in all sorts of places. A retaining wall outside my local surf club suffered significant collapse. The cost both to the council and to government generally to replace that retaining wall will be significant. Landslips of heavy soils caused by the rain are prevalent right throughout the region. This is not only a water issue; it is a wind problem as well. A lot of trees have come down, roots and all, because of the heavy soils and they are causing damage all over the place. Country Energy, the electricity supplier, is dealing with significant blackouts right throughout the region.
and is working tirelessly to resolve those issues. Sewer and water networks are overflowing and under pressure. Hopefully they will come back online soon. So the public infrastructure has been fully tested and, at times, broken. Again, this cannot be left to local authorities to resolve as we try to recover from what has happened over the last 48 hours.

I must say a few thank yous. The State Emergency Service crews have been absolutely tire-less in their work throughout the region, travelling from all over the state of New South Wales in particular. I think the furthest that a crew has travelled to assist in the region was from Nowra, so certainly I give a big thank you to the SES generally. There were 19 flood rescues in Kempsey alone. In the middle of the night, one boy was taken by the SES in a flood boat to get dialysis treatment at the local hospital. That is just an example of the good work that is done under the cover of darkness by people who are essentially volunteers in the community. So, on behalf of the broader community, I say thank you very much for that work.

The state RTA has made some statements that all damaged local roads will be repaired at their expense. I hope that is true. They have said that all registration and licensing fees will be waived for flood damaged cars. I hope that is true as well. I understand there will be some delays to the Pacific Highway works due to the simple fact that a supply of materials cannot get through at this stage. Hopefully, that work can get back on track as soon as possible.

I want to thank many other agencies as well as the SES. Country Energy employees were working hard, as were the police, the ambulance and all the services, and the Westpac rescue helicopter was seen in the area on a number of occasions. Many thanks to all of them. I have also received several emails today—and hopefully everyone in this place supports this—about thanking the local media, which, at a time like this, turn into an emergency service. That is particularly the case with local radio and the ABC. They have fulfilled a very important role throughout the region. I know it is dangerous to identify one person, but there has been a lot of feedback about some of the all-night calls done by the station manager, Cameron Marshall. He has certainly expanded his fan base within the region. In a soothing way he kept a good handle on all the various issues as they arose throughout the region. It was a radio call that was listened to by many.

Finally, I would like to thank the community at large. There are the potential dangers of people acting irrationally at times like this, but it is with ongoing pride that I can say our region acts with ongoing sense in times of crisis. In our region there is a deep resilience, which is one of the defining characteristics of the mid-North Coast, quite often despite natural disasters and despite what government does or does not deliver to our region. When you look into the eyes of community members on the mid-North Coast, when you look deep into the heart of the community generally, what you see is resilience. As a defining characteristic, I think it is one the community can be very, very proud of—and it has certainly been on show again over the last 48 hours with these floods.

**Sport**

Mr SULLIVAN (Longman) (9.17 pm)—I want to use the time available to me tonight to talk about sport. Australia is often accused, mostly by Australians, of having an unhealthy obsession with sport. The truth, of course, is that Australia is no more or less infatuated with sports, sports people and sporting achievements than any other nation. The only differences are those of the particular sport or sports that attract mass followings in different countries. But all countries have a shared interest in the Olympic Games; the games have something for
everyone. Australia’s lack of success at the Montreal Olympics in 1976 was the catalyst for the Australian government establishing the Australian Institute of Sport in 1981. That approach had been recommended in 1974 by Bloomfield, who based his research and recommendations on various institutes in Europe, and it was fleshed out later by Coles in 1975.

The AIS has had a degree of success. The cycling program, for example, has resulted in Australia punching above its weight in international cycling competition. No doubt this will be the case for some other sports also. Yet in swimming, without argument our most successful Olympic sport, our Olympic team members and medallists are more routinely drawn from the squads of private coaches operating at suburban swimming pools. Nearly 30 years on from the establishment of the AIS, it is appropriate to ask if this continues to be the only way forward for sport in Australia.

Honourable members will be aware of the establishment in August 2008 of the Independent Sport Panel, chaired by David Crawford, who has runs on the board, having been involved previously in the process of modernisation of both the Australian Football League and Football Federation Australia. The panel has consulted widely with sporting bodies, interest groups and the community. The panel has been given four terms of reference: ensure Australia’s continued elite sporting success; better place sport and physical activity as a key component of the government’s preventative health approach; strengthen pathways from junior sport to grassroots community sport right through to elite and professional sport; and, maintain Australia’s cutting-edge approach to sports science, research and technology. I am particularly interested in the third of these terms of reference, the pathways for athletes from junior sport through to professional sport. I am also in agreement with the thrust of the submission to the panel on behalf of Australian University Sport. In essence, with regard to the third term of reference, the AUS submission recommends:

Exploring the establishment of elite competitions through the Australian university sector must be a priority.

Australian National University student Lisa Kitvitee undertook a parliamentary internship on my staff last year and produced an excellent report on this subject titled The Australian brawn drain. I would be happy to make copies available to those who might want one.

Honourable members will also have some knowledge of the various university or college based sports programs offered in the United States. It is US practice to use the term ‘athletics’ to represent all sports; that is a practice I will adopt where appropriate in this contribution. Many members will be aware of student athletes from their own electorates who are currently attending universities and colleges in America on athletics scholarships. Whilst there is no means of accurately recording the number of Australian scholarship holders, it is estimated that 750 are joining the brawn drain each year, with around 2,000 Australians on US college athletics rosters at any time. But, unlike their American counterparts, our junior athletes are not aware of the existence of US college opportunities from the outset of their athletics careers. In truth, there is a suggestion that many of our peak sporting bodies either deliberately hide the fact from their athletes or actively discourage them from taking up offers that may be made. This is the gap in the pathway between junior sport and elite professional sport available to Australia’s young athletes.

The benefit that America derives from its college athletics program ought to be obvious to all. Precious few of America’s Olympic medallists will not have spent four years in intensive
training and competing regimes at colleges across the country. In many cases, they will be competing at the Olympics before they have graduated. The introduction into Australia of a university based elite sports system modelled on the US system is the next logical step for Australia and will, as it develops, plug the gap that currently exists—a gap that sees too many promising young athletes drop out of their sport and seriously depletes our talent pool.

Comparing the Australian and US experiences in women’s softball illustrates how Australia is disadvantaged, both from the point of view of the individual player and as a sport generally. A young girl growing up in the US will know from an early age that sporting prowess will provide her with the opportunity to attend university on an athletics scholarship. Her family will encourage and assist her if she shows promise in any sport. If that sport is softball, through the travel ball organisations she will have an intensive summer tournament competition, routinely playing eight to 10 games per tournament and playing one tournament per fortnight, leading into national championships for girls in age groups from 10 and under through to 18 and under.

In contrast, her Australian counterpart will have a leisurely one game per weekend in her local league. She will have the opportunity to play in one state championship tournament each year, at under 14, under 16 and under 19 level, perhaps as many as 10 games at a time. The very best will represent their state at the national titles at under 16 and under 19, perhaps playing another 10 games. Her family will be totally unaware of the US college athletics system or, if they have heard of it, will have very little idea of how to pursue the matter.

On graduating from high school, the American girl, if she is talented, is likely to be offered a place in a team at a four-year university or a two-year junior college, with most of them receiving some level of financial assistance from the university. The best of them will be actively sought by a number of universities and will often receive what is called ‘the full ride’: all tuition, books, living and sporting expenses paid by the university that secures their signature. A university team will typically play 50-plus games in the months of February, March and April, with national championships held in May.

On graduating from high school, the Australian girl has nothing to look forward to. A few of those considered the very best will enter the AIS program. There are currently 23 women, ranging in age from around 19 to their late 20s, in the AIS program, at least four of whom are regulars in the Australian national team. Some others may be assisted by programs run through their state associations. For the rest, there is nothing other than the one league game per weekend, with the prospect of a long wait for senior team positions to become available and the certainty that those places will go to other players who have been ‘identified’ and placed in the program, as I mentioned earlier. It is no wonder that the American system is attractive to them—though, to be fair, the sport has been active in recent years to improve the situation.

For young women between the ages of 18 and 23, four years in the US playing a game they love and obtaining a university qualification is a very good deal. But prolonged separation from friends and family can also have an impact, and not all are able to take the fullest advantage of the opportunity they are given.

US softball derives a tremendous benefit from player participation via the college system, particularly by comparison with Australia. The population of the US is around 307 million. At 21 million, Australia is about seven per cent the size of the US. There are in the order of 1,000
four-year universities fielding a softball team in intercollegiate competition and another 1,000 two-year junior colleges doing the same. That means there are around 35,000 young women aged 18 to 23 competing in intensive competition. To have equivalency, Australia would need around 2,500 young women playing at a comparable level. We simply do not. Importantly, that number of US teams also translates into around 3,500 full-time softball coaches. An equivalent number for Australia would be 245. There are maybe a dozen. It is simply impossible to compete against that weight of numbers, be it players or coaches, which highlights the achievement of Australia’s few victories over the US national team.

While I have illustrated the situation using women’s softball, the experience will be the same for many sports. The development of university based competitions will tick a number of boxes which are considered by both government and community to be desirable. It will provide the capacity to transition young athletes between youth sport and elite sport. It will provide the impetus and opportunity for young people to obtain tertiary qualifications they might otherwise not attempt. It will provide the incentive needed to keep young athletes involved in sport at ages when participation numbers are traditionally depleted. It will provide the encouragement for young people to engage early in activities that promote health and fitness. And, not least, it will provide us with an expanded talent pool from which to select athletes for elite representative teams, enhancing prospects of international success.

I urge the Independent Sports Panel to look seriously at the submission from Australian University Sport as providing the right way forward for sports development in Australia.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! There being no further grievances, the debate is adjourned, and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Main Committee adjourned at 9.26 pm
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy: Moncrieff Electorate

(Question No. 588)

Mr Ciobo asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 10 February 2009:

In respect of the Government’s funding of organisations and projects between 3 December 2007 and 20 January 2009:

(a) which organisations and projects based in the Moncrieff electorate received funding from the Minister’s department

(b) what sum of funding did each organization and project receive, and

(c) for what purpose was each funding commitment made.

Mr Albanese—The Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(a) Satpac Pty Ltd received funding through the Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme in the Moncrieff electorate between 3 December 2007 and 20 January 2009.

(b) Satpac Pty Ltd received $10,400.

(c) The Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme is an Australian Government initiative to help people living or working in the most remote parts of Australia purchase satellite mobile phones. The application by an individual must be approved before the phone is purchased and the dealer, of which Satpac Pty Ltd is one, deducts the subsidy from the retail price of the phone to consumers.

Health and Ageing: Moncrieff Electorate

(Question No. 590)

Mr Ciobo asked the Minister for Ageing, in writing, on 10 February 2009:

With reference to the Government’s funding of organisations and projects between 3 December 2007 and 20 January 2009: (a) which organisations and projects within the Moncrieff electorate received funding from the department; (b) how much funding did each organisation or project receive; and (c) for what purpose was each funding commitment made.

Mrs Elliot—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

For the answer to this question please refer to Senate Question on Notice 1276.

Small Business

(Question No. 658)

Mr Ciobo asked the Prime Minister and Other Ministers, in writing, on 18 March 2009:

(1) From 3 December 2007 to 19 March 2009:

(a) how many and what percentage of payments made by the Minister’s department to small businesses were not made within (i) 30, and (ii) 60 days of receipt of the goods or services and an invoice; and

(b) what was the average time lapsed between invoice received and payments made by the Minister’s department to small businesses.
Mr Rudd—I am advised that the answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Payments to small businesses data has been prepared and submitted to the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research for the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008.

(1) From 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008:

(a) (i) 2,746 payments, representing 10.0% of all payments to small businesses, were not made with 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice. (ii) 1,206 payments, representing 4.4% of all payments to small businesses, were not made with 60 days of receipt of a valid invoice.

(b) Average time elapsed between receipt of invoice and payment to small businesses was 23 days.

Small Business
(Question No. 678)

Mr Ciobo asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, in writing, on 19 March 2009:

(1) From 3 December 2007 to 19 March 2009:

(a) how many and what percentage of payments made by the Minister’s department to small businesses were not made within (i) 30, and (ii) 60 days of receipt of the goods or services and an invoice; and

(b) what was the average time lapsed between invoice received and payments made by the Minister’s department to small businesses.

Mr Burke—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) (a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 July 2007-30 June 2008</th>
<th>(i) Not made within 30 days</th>
<th>(ii) Not made within 60 days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of invoices (‘000)</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of invoices by number</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above was based on the last small business survey submitted to the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research for the period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008.

(b) The average time lapsed between invoice received and payment made by the department is 21 days.

Details provided are for all payments as the agency is unable to extract information for small business only.

Small Business
(Question Nos 679 and 680)

Mr Ciobo asked the Minister for Resources and Energy and the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 19 March 2009:

(1) From 3 December 2007 to 19 March 2009:

(a) how many and what percentage of payments made by the Minister’s department to small businesses were not made within

(i) 30, and

(ii) 60 days of receipt of the goods or services and an invoice; and
(b) what was the average time lapsed between invoice received and payments made by the Minister’s department to small businesses.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

For the period 3 December 2008 to 30 June 2008:

(1) (a) (i) My Department made 17 payments (1.6%) to small businesses between 30 and 60 days.
(ii) My Department made 4 payments (0.4%) to small businesses after 60 days.

(b) The average time lapsed between invoice received and payments made by my Department to small business was 11.9 days.